

THE ADVENTURES OF REMI





Bob Falter.
May 4. 1930.





The wide world was before Remi

THE WINDERMERE SERIES

THE ADVENTURES OF REMI

From the French of Hector Malot's "Sans Famille." Translated and arranged by

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RAND McNALLY & COMPANY

CHICAGO

NEW YORK

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THE PREFACE

Hector Malot, the author of *Sans Famille*,¹ was born in the year 1830 in a small village of the Department of Lower Seine. While still in his early teens the boy was sent to Paris to undertake the long apprenticeship which should make of him a notary, as his father had been before him—not a notary as we understand that office here in America, but a French *notaire*, who is a sort of certified public official, authorized to draw up and register important legal documents. Hector attended to his studies with such success that he was soon head clerk in a great establishment, and shortly after he was twenty years of age he was in a fair way to securing the university degree that would make him a full-fledged lawyer.

Suddenly, however, on the very eve of his graduation from law school, he gave up his studies and set himself to writing for the newspapers. At first he was content to be merely a reporter, but before long we find him becoming everywhere known for his clever editorials and his articles on musical and literary criticism. But even this kind of work failed to satisfy him fully, for before he was thirty years of age he had definitely settled down to writing the long series of novels which were to make him famous and which he continued to turn out until shortly before his death in 1907.

All these facts and many more about Malot are recited in the French books of reference, but in most of them there is no mention of the story which deals with our hero Remi. This is all the more strange, since it is just this one tale upon which today rests the fame of our author. It was awarded by the French Academy that prize for which every young artist longs, and of which every young scientist dreams. And this narrative of child life, alone of all the writings of Malot, has appeared in numberless editions, has been translated into a

¹ Pronounce Malot to rime with *tallow*, Remi to rime with *Mamie*, and *Sans Famille* as if it were written *sang famee*.

dozen languages, has been devoured by millions of eager readers, and shows no signs that it will ever die.

Vitalis, Remi, Mattia! Cappy, Sport, and Dandiprat! I can promise my young friends that after they have once learned these figures from the immortal pages of Malot they will forget them as little as they do the people of the real world whom they come to know and love. My translation, which is a new one throughout, has been done with great care and with a view of sacrificing nothing of the simple strength and beauty of the original.

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THE ADVENTURES OF REMI

CHAPTER I

IN THE VILLAGE

I am a foundling.

But until I was eight years old I thought I had a mother, just as all other children did. For whenever I cried a woman held me gently in her arms and rocked me until my tears ceased to flow.

When at night I climbed into my bed, never once did this woman fail to come and cuddle me. And when December winds would blow the snow against the frosted panes, she would take my feet between her two hands and warm them for me, while she sang me a little song, the air and some of the words of which stick in my mind today.

If I was tending our cow beside the grass-grown roads or on the moor and was surprised by a downpour of rain, she would come running to meet me. And she would turn up her woolen petticoat and, wrapping it about my head and shoulders, make me take shelter underneath it.

Yes, and if I had had a quarrel with one of my playmates, she made me tell her all my troubles. She almost

never failed to find good words of comfort for me or to take my side in the matter.

Because of all these things and many others, too, because of the way in which she spoke to me and looked at me, because of her kisses and the gentleness of her scoldings, I felt sure that she was my mother.

And now I shall tell how I learned she was only my nurse.

My village, or, to speak more correctly, the village where I had been raised — for I did not have a village of my own, a birthplace, any more than I had a father or mother — anyway, the village in which I had passed my childhood was called Chavanon. It is one of the poorest villages in central France.

This poverty was not due to either the carelessness or the lazy habits of its inhabitants, but to conditions which are found in a barren countryside. The soil had no depth, and to produce good crops it needed fertilizers and manures which were lacking in the district. So there were but few cultivated sections of land to be found anywhere about, whereas in every direction one could see great stretches of moorland covered only with heather and broom. Where the moors ended, the waste lands began. And on these barren heights the cutting winds stunted the thin clusters of trees which here and there lifted up their twisted and tormented boughs.

To find beautiful trees, one must abandon the higher ground and go down into the ravines, by the river banks where in the narrow meadows great chestnut trees and oaks flourished.

It was in one of these hidden dales, beside a brook whose swift waters emptied into one of the tributary streams of the Loire, that the house stood in which I passed my earliest years.

Until I was eight years old I had never seen a man in this house. And yet my mother was not a widow. Her husband, who was a stonecutter, worked in Paris, as did a large number of the other rustic workmen. He had not been back to the village since I had been old enough to notice or understand what was going on around me. From time to time he would simply send home news by some comrade who passed our house on his way back to the village.

"Mother Barberin," this messenger would say, "your man is getting along all right. He asked me to say that he is hard at work and told me to hand you this money. Will you count it?"

That would be all. Mother Barberin was content with the news. Her man was in good health and had work. He was earning a livelihood.

It must not be imagined that Barberin was on bad terms with his wife just because he had stayed so long in Paris. Discord had nothing to do with his absence. He dwelt in Paris because his work kept him there; that was the whole reason. When he grew old he would return and settle down with his wife on the money they had saved. This would keep them from want during the years when old age had robbed them of their vigor and their health.

One day in November, just as dusk was falling, a

man whom I did not know stopped before our gate. I was splitting firewood on the doorstep. Without opening the gate, but looking at me over the top bar of it, the man asked whether that was not where Mother Barberin lived. I asked him to come in. He pushed open the gate, which creaked on its hinges, and came toward the house with shuffling steps.

I had never seen such a dirty man. Patches of mud, some of them still wet, others long dry, covered him from head to foot. Just to look at him, you knew that he had tramped a long way over bad roads.

At the sound of our voices Mother Barberin ran out. She came face to face with him just as he was about to cross the threshold.

"I bring you word from Paris," he said.

They were simple words which had already met our ears more than once. But the tone in which they were pronounced was very different from the one that ordinarily accompanied the statement, "Your man is well and has plenty of work."

"Oh, dear me!" cried Mother Barberin, wringing her hands. "Jerome has had an accident!"

"Well, yes, he has, but you don't need to be so frightened about it. Your man has been hurt, that's true enough, but he isn't dead. Perhaps he may be crippled, though. Just now he's in the hospital. I was in the next bed to him, and when I started back for the country he asked me to tell you about it as I was passing by. I can't stop any longer, for I've still three leagues to walk and it's growing late."

Mother Barberin, who wanted to know all about the accident, begged the man to stay to supper. The roads were bad; it was said wolves had been seen in the woods. He could start the next morning.

He sat down in the chimney corner, and as he ate his supper he told us how the accident had occurred. Barberin had been half crushed by the fall of some scaffolding. And, as it had been proved that he had no business to be where the accident had happened, the building contractor had refused to pay him any damages.

"Poor old Barberin," he said, "he has no luck at all! There are rascals who would have got a regular income from such an affair, but your man won't get a penny out of it."

And as he went on drying the legs of his trousers, which were getting stiff from their coating of thick mud, he kept repeating this phrase, "No luck at all!" And he did this with so sincere a grief as to convince you that, as far as he was concerned, he would be glad to be crippled if only he might win in this way a worth-while sum of money.

"Anyway," he said as he finished his recital, "I advised him to have the law on the contractor."

"A lawsuit! That costs, let me tell you."

"Sure. But suppose you win it?"

Mother Barberin would have liked to go to Paris, only a trip like that is a pretty bad business, so long and so costly.

Next morning we went down to the village to have a talk with the priest. He told her not to leave home

without first finding out whether she could be of any help to her husband. He wrote to the chaplain of the hospital where Barberin was being treated. And some days later the priest received a reply which said she should not come, but should send a certain sum of money to her husband, because he was going to sue the contractor in whose employ he had been injured.

Days and weeks passed. From time to time letters arrived, each of which asked that more money be forwarded. The last note, more urgent than the others, said that if there was no more money the cow would have to be sold to get some.

Only those who have lived with peasants in the country can realize the distress and grief caused by these words, "The cow has to be sold."

For the casual observer the cow is a beast which fits nicely into the landscape when she raises from the grass her black muzzle moist with dew. For the city-dweller she is the source of milk for coffee and of cream cheese. But for the peasant she is something far better. However poor he may be, however large a family he may have, he is sure they will not suffer hunger so long as there is a cow in the barn. The whole family gets butter to put in its soup, and milk to moisten the potatoes.

We lived so well from our cow, Mother Barberin and I, that, until the moment when my story begins, I had hardly ever tasted a piece of meat. But the animal was not only (so to speak) our nurse; she was more than that — our comrade and friend. For you must not think the cow is a stupid animal; that is not true. She is most

intelligent. When we stroked and patted ours and talked to her, she understood what we meant. And, for her part, she knew very well how to tell us with her great soft brown eyes just what she wanted and what she did not want.

The fact is we loved her and she loved us. That's all there is to be said. Still, part with her we must. For it was only by selling the cow that we could hope to satisfy Barberin.

A cattle buyer came to the house. And after he had carefully looked over Roussette, after he had poked her at great length — shaking his head discontentedly and repeating a hundred times that she would not suit him at all, that she was a cow of the poor, just such a cow as he was never able to resell, that she was poor in milk and would make bad butter — he ended by agreeing to take her, but only because of his kindness of heart and to oblige Mother Barberin, who was a good woman.

Poor Roussette, as if she understood everything that was going on, refused to budge from her stable and began to moo.

"Go behind her and chase her out," the buyer said to me, handing me the whip that he carried twisted around his neck.

"Don't you do it," Mother Barberin said. Taking the cow by her tethering rope, she spoke to her gently. "So, my pretty, come on — come on!"

And Roussette no longer resisted. Once the cow was out on the road, the buyer tied her behind his cart and she had to follow the horse, whether or no.

We went back into the house, but for a long time afterward we could hear her bellowings.

No more milk, no more butter! In the morning a piece of bread. In the evening potatoes with a sprinkling of salt.

Shrove Tuesday came just a short while after the sale of Roussette. The year before, on this feast day, Mother Barberin had given me a banquet of pancakes and apple fritters. And I had eaten such a lot that she had been very happy. But at that time we had Roussette, who had furnished us milk to mix with the dough and butter to put in the skillet.

No more Roussette, no more milk, no more butter, no more Shrove Tuesday — these were the words I now kept sadly repeating.

But Mother Barberin had a surprise for me. Although she was not one to borrow, she had asked one of our neighbors for a cup of milk and another for a piece of butter. And when I came home about noontime she was just emptying the flour into a big earthenware crock.

“Oh, look! Flour!” I said, edging up to her.

“Why, of course,” she said smilingly. “As you say, little Remi, it is flour, nice wheat flour. See how good it smells.”

If I had just dared, I should have asked what this flour was for. But I did not dare inquire, simply because I was so anxious to know. And then, besides, I did not wish Mother to guess I remembered it was Shrove Tuesday for fear it might make her feel bad.

"What do you suppose one makes with flour?" she asked, looking at me closely.

"Bread."

"What else?"

"Pudding."

"What else?"

"Gee! I don't know."

"Oh, you know well enough! Only, you're such a good little boy, you pretend you don't. You know that today is Shrove Tuesday, the day of pancakes and apple fritters. But, because you also know that we have no butter and no milk, you don't like to confess it. Am I right?"

"O Mother Barberin, please —"

"Because I guessed all that beforehand, I fixed it so Shrove Tuesday would not disappoint you. Look in the bread box."

The lid lifted (and it was quickly done!), I spied milk, butter, eggs, and three apples.

"Hand me the eggs," she said to me. "And while I am breaking them you peel the apples."

While I was cutting the apples into slices, she broke the eggs into the flour and began to beat them vigorously together, adding from time to time a tablespoonful of milk. When the dough was well mixed, Mother Barberin set the earthen crock on the warm coals. And then there was nothing more to do but wait for evening to come, for it was at supper that we were to eat the pancakes and the fritters.

To be quite frank, I shall have to confess that the

day seemed long to me and that more than once I stole over to raise the cloth which covered the bowl.

"The batter'll get cold," Mother Barberin would warn me, "and then it won't rise well."

But it was rising finely, and here and there little swellings were appearing, little bubbles that kept bursting through to the top. And from the fermenting batter there came the nicest smell of eggs and milk.

"Go split some fagots," she told me. "We need a good clear fire without any smoke."

At last (at last!) the candle was lighted.

"Put the kindling on the fire," she said.

It was not necessary to tell me twice what I had long been waiting so impatiently to hear. Soon a bright flame was flaring up the chimney, and its wavering light filled the kitchen.

Then Mother Barberin took the frying pan from its hook on the wall and held it over the flame.

"Give me the butter."

She took on the tip of her knife a piece of it as big as a small nut and put it in the skillet, where it melted and sizzled.

Ah! There was an odor that tickled the palate more agreeably than any we had smelled for a long time. Then, too, that was jolly music which was being produced by the spluttering and the sizzling of the butter.

However, attentive as I was to this music, it seemed to me as if I heard the noise of footsteps in the yard. Who could possibly be coming to disturb us at such an hour? Some neighbor, perhaps, to borrow a shovelful of live coals?

But I could not keep my mind on this train of thought, for Mother Barberin had just thrust the kitchen spoon into the bowl and was now pouring a thin layer of white batter into the pan. And this was not a time to permit one's self to be distracted from the matter in hand.

A cane tapped upon the doorstep. Immediately afterward the door was flung open abruptly.

"Who is there?" asked Mother Barberin, without turning around.

A man had entered. By the bright flame that shone full upon him I noticed that he was dressed in a white smock and that his hand grasped a big stick.

"So we're having a regular party, are we? Pray don't disturb yourselves," he said in a rough voice.

"Heavens!" cried Mother Barberin, quickly setting the skillet on the ground. "Is it really you, Jerome?"

Then she seized me by the arm and pushed me toward the man who had halted upon the threshold.

"It is your father."

CHAPTER II

A FOSTER FATHER

I went up to be kissed in my turn, but he stopped me with the end of his stick.

"And who may this be?"

"It's Remi."

"I thought you told me —"

"Well, yes, I did — it wasn't the truth, because —"

"So you lied to me, eh?"

He took several steps in my direction with lifted cane, and I instinctively dodged back. What had I done? In what way had I been naughty? I had been only going to kiss him. Why should he treat me so? I did not have time to examine these various questions which were weighing down my troubled spirit.

"I see you're celebrating Shrove Tuesday," he said. "That's just fine, for I'm half starved. What have you got for supper?"

"I was making pancakes."

"So I see. But you're not going to feed pancakes to a man whose legs have ten leagues to their credit?"

"That's all I have. We weren't expecting you."

He raised his eyes to the ceiling to the spot where the bacon used to hang. But for a long time the hook had been empty, and from the rafter were strung now only a few ropes of garlic and onions.

"Here are some onions," he said, knocking a cluster

down with his stick. "Four or five onions, a bit of butter, and we'll have a good soup. Take out your pancake and fry us some onions in your skillet."

Take the pancake from the frying pan! Mother Barberin had no reply to make to that command. On the contrary, she made haste to do what her man asked, while he sat crouching down in the corner by the fireplace.

I had not dared to leave the place where the stick had driven me. So I leaned against the table and looked at him closely.

He was a man about fifty years old, with a hard face and a rough manner. Because of the injury he had received, he carried his head bent over toward his right shoulder, and this deformity helped to give him a fairly forbidding appearance.

Mother Barberin had put the skillet back on the fire.

"Is that all the butter you're going to use in the soup?" he said. Then, taking the plate that had the butter on it, he turned the whole pat into the pan.

No more butter — in that case, no more pancakes.

At any other time it is certain I should have been greatly affected by this misfortune. But just then I was not worrying about pancakes nor about fritters. The whole idea that held my spirit captive was that this man who seemed so harsh was my father.

"My father, my father!" I kept repeating the words to myself half unconsciously.

I had never exactly asked myself what a father would be like. Vaguely, as a matter of instinct almost, I had pictured him as a mother with a bass voice. But I was

most painfully frightened as I gazed at this one who had fallen right out of a clear sky.

Why, when I had only tried to kiss him, had he driven me away from him with the end of his cane? Mother Barberin had never pushed me out of the way when I tried to kiss her; just the opposite — she had taken me up in her arms and held me tight.

“Don’t stand there as if you were frozen stiff!” he said to me. “Set the table.”

I hastened to obey. The soup was ready. Mother Barberin poured it into the plates. Then, leaving the chimney corner, my father took his seat at the table and began to eat. He stopped for a minute now and then to cast a glance at me.

I was so confused and restless that I could not swallow a mouthful. And so I gazed at him, too, but secretly, lowering my eyelids quickly whenever he looked my way.

“Doesn’t he eat more than that ordinarily?” he asked all of a sudden, pointing at me with his spoon.

“Oh, yes, he has a good appetite.”

“So much the worse for him if he doesn’t eat anything now!”

Of course, I had no desire to talk, and Mother Barberin was no more inclined than I to conversation. She busied herself solely in serving her husband.

“Aren’t you hungry?” he said to me.

“No.”

“All right, then! Go to bed, and see that you fall asleep at once. If you don’t, I’ll be angry.”

Mother Barberin signaled me with her eyes to obey without answering back. She might as well have omitted the warning, for it did not enter my head to object.

As is the case in a great number of farmhouses, our kitchen was at the same time our bedroom. Near the chimney were all the things which had to do with food: table, kneading trough, cupboard. At the other side of the room were the furnishings that had to do with sleeping. In one corner stood the bed of Mother Barberin; in the other corner, my own, in a sort of alcove shut off by a red figured drapery.

I hurried to throw off my clothes and crawl into bed. But sleeping — ah, that was another matter! You don't go to sleep because you are ordered to. You sleep because you are drowsy and feel happy. Now neither was I drowsy nor did I feel happy. On the contrary, I was terribly wakeful and most unhappy besides.

How could it be that this man was my father? If he was, then why did he treat me so harshly? With my nose glued to the wall, I made an effort to drive these ideas away and go to sleep as I had been ordered. But there was no use trying. Sleep simply would not come. I had never felt so wide awake.

I don't know how long a time had passed when I heard some one coming over to my bed. I knew at once it wasn't Mother Barberin because of the heavy, shuffling tread. I felt a hot breath on my hair.

"Are you asleep?" a muffled voice asked.

I was careful not to answer, for the terrible words "I'll be angry" were still ringing in my ears.

"He is asleep," Mother Barberin said. "He's always off the second his head touches the pillow. You can talk without fear that he'll hear you."

I suppose I should have said I was not asleep, but I just did not dare to. I had been commanded to sleep, I had not done so, and I felt it was wrong of me.

"What about your lawsuit?" Mother Barberin asked.

"Lost. The judges decided I had no right to be under the scaffolding and the contractor owed me nothing by way of damages."

Thereupon he banged the table with his fist and began to swear in a crazy fashion.

"Lost the suit, lost the money — crippled — in want, ha-ha! And, as if that was not enough for a fellow, I come back and find myself saddled with a child. Will you tell me why you didn't do as I asked you to?"

"Because I could not bring myself to do it."

"Couldn't take him to the Foundlings' Home, eh?"

"A woman can't desert like that a child that she has nursed and grown to love."

"It is no child of yours."

"Oh, I tried to do what you asked, but just then it fell ill."

"Ill, was it?"

"Yes. At such a time I could not take him to the Home, could I, to let him die?"

"But when he got well again?"

"Ah, he did not get well all of a sudden. After the first illness there came another. It was heart-breaking to hear him cough, poor little chap. That's the way our

own little Nicholas died. And I felt it in my bones that he would die, too, if I dragged him off to town."

"But what happened after all that?"

"One day followed another. If I had waited so long, I might just as well wait a little longer."

"How old is he now?"

"Eight years."

"Well, he's going now where he should have gone years ago, and he won't like it so well. You see what you've gained by your action!"

"O Jerome, you just can't do it!"

"Can't I? Who's going to stop me, I'd like to know! Do you think we can keep him always?"

There was a moment of silence, and I could breathe again. My feelings had been choking me until I almost strangled.

It was some time before Mother Barberin replied, "Ah, how Paris has changed you! You wouldn't have talked like that before you went to the city."

"Perhaps not. But there's one thing sure — if Paris altered me, it also crippled me. How could we earn his living now, to say nothing of our own? We haven't a cent left. The cow is sold. When we are starving ourselves, must we support a child that doesn't belong to us?"

"It belongs to me."

"It is neither yours nor mine. He's no country lad. I looked at him during supper. He's a delicate lad, skin and bones, no arms, no legs."

"He's the prettiest boy in all the country round."

"I didn't say he was bad looking, I said he wasn't

sturdy. His looks won't get him anything to eat, will they? Did you ever see a working man with shoulders like his? He's a city brat, and we can't make any use of city brats here."

"I tell you he's a fine boy and just as smart as they make them. He's got a good heart, too, and he'll work for us."

"Meanwhile we'd have to work for him. And I'm no longer good for anything."

"Suppose his parents come to claim him, what then?"

"Parents? I don't believe he's got any. If he had, they would have found him in eight years, that's sure. It was a fool piece of business for me to imagine his parents would come to claim him some day and would pay us for our trouble in bringing him up. I was a noodle, nothing less. Just because he was swathed in pretty clothes trimmed with lace, that didn't prove that his parents would hunt for him. Besides, they're probably dead."

"But suppose they're not. What if one day they should come and ask for him? I have an idea they will do just that."

"What obstinate creatures women are!"

"Answer me! Suppose they do come."

"All right, then! We'll send them to the Home. But enough of such talk; it wearies me. Tomorrow I'll take him to the mayor. I'm going round to say hello to François this evening. I'll be back in an hour."

The door opened and closed behind him. He had gone.

Then I sat up quickly, I tell you, and started to call for Mother Barberin. She ran to my bedside.

"Say, Mama, are you going to let me be taken to the Foundlings' Home?"

"No, dear little Remi, no." And she put her arms around me tightly and gave me a tender kiss.

This gave me courage, and my tears ceased to flow.

"Then you weren't asleep, after all?" she asked softly.

"It wasn't my fault."

"I'm not scolding you. Then you heard everything that Jerome said?"

"Yes, you're not my mama. But he is not my father."

I did not utter these two sentences in the same tone. For, if I was grieved to learn that she was not my mother, I was happy — nay, proud — to discover that he was not my father. So it came about that this difference in my feelings betrayed itself in my voice.

But Mother Barberin seemed to pay no attention to it.

"I suppose I should have told you the truth," she said, "but you were so much like my own child that I could not let you know you were not mine unless it was absolutely necessary. Poor little fellow, your mother, as you heard, is not known. We are even ignorant as to whether she is dead or alive. One morning in Paris, as Jerome was going to his work and was walking along a street called the Avenue de Breteuil, he heard the wailing cries of a baby. They seemed to come from the recess of a garden gate. It was just at daybreak in the month of February. He drew near to the gate and discovered a child lying on the step.

"He looked about him to call for help, when he saw a man dodge from behind one of the great trees with which the broad avenue was lined and escape. Without doubt this man had lain in wait to see whether some one would find the infant which he himself had placed in the recess of the gateway. Now Jerome was very much put to it as to what to do, for the baby was crying at the top of its lungs, quite as if it understood that help had arrived and was determined not to be put back on the step again.

"While Jerome was trying to make up his mind what he should do, some other workmen came along, and it was decided that he should carry the child to the police station. The baby simply would not stop crying. It probably was suffering from the chill air. But, after it got good and warm in the station and still continued to wail, they decided it must be half dead with hunger, and so they sent out and got it some milk. The child fairly threw itself upon the bottle and showed every sign of being famished.

"After that they undressed it before the stove. It was a fine boy five or six months old, pink, fat, big for its age, beautiful. The long clothes and the fine linens in which it was wrapped indicated clearly that it belonged to rich parents. It was evidently an infant who had been first stolen and then abandoned. At least, that is what the commissary of police suggested.

"What was the next thing to be done? First, the police officer wrote down all that Jerome knew and then a description of the child and its unmarked clothes, and

then he announced he was going to send the waif to the Foundlings' Home unless some one of the group about him wished to take charge of the child. He was a splendid infant, healthy and robust, who would not be hard to rear; and his parents, who would be sure to search for him, would generously reward those who had cared for the foundling. Well, Jerome stepped forward and offered to be responsible for you. At that time I had a child of just your age and was well able to nurse both of you. That's the way that I became your mother."

"O Mama!"

"At the end of three months I lost my baby, and that made me even fonder of you than before. I came to forget that you were not my very own flesh. Unfortunately, Jerome remembered that fact. And when, after a long while, he saw your relatives were not hunting for you, or at least had not found you, he wished to send you to the Home. You heard me say why I did not obey him."

"Oh, don't send me to the Home!" I cried, clinging to her convulsively. "Please don't, Mother Barberin."

"There, my dear! You won't have to go, I'll attend to that. Jerome is not really a bad man, you'll see. His troubles and his fear for the future have got him all worked up. We'll work, and you can work, too."

"Yes, I'll do anything you want me to if only you won't send me to the Home."

"You won't go, but on one condition, and that's that you will go right off to sleep. He must not find you awake when he gets back."

She kissed me and turned me over so I faced the wall.

I tried as hard as I could to doze off, but I had been too rudely disturbed, too deeply stirred, to find sleep the moment I wanted it.

So Mother Barberin, so good and sweet to me, was not my real mother! What could a real mama be like, then? Even better and kinder? Oh, never! That would not be possible.

But a thing that I could understand perfectly was that a father would be less harsh than Barberin, would not have looked at me with such a cold glance and with raised stick.

He was determined to send me to the Home. Would Mother Barberin be able to keep him from doing so? What sort of place was the Home?

There were two children in the village who were called Poorhouse Kids. Each had a lead disk hung round his neck, with a number on it. They were badly dressed and dirty. The other children mocked them and struck them, chased them cruelly, the way you'd chase a stray dog — just for the fun of the thing and because a strange dog has no one to defend him.

Oh, I didn't want to be like those kids! I didn't want a number around my neck and to be chased by children crying, "Go back to the Poorhouse, you brat!" The mere thought of it gave me a chill and made my teeth chatter.

And I wasn't going to sleep. And Barberin would be back now, at any moment. Happily he did not return as soon as he had promised, and slumber arrived before he did.

CHAPTER III

THE TROUPE OF SIGNOR VITALIS

I must have dreamed all night, I was so frightened and troubled. For when I awoke next morning my first movement was to grope around in my bed and look about me to make sure they had not carried me off after all.

Barberin said not a word to me all the morning, and I began to think the plan of sending me to the Home had been given up. Doubtless Mother Barberin had spoken about it and had made him decide to keep me.

But, when noon sounded, Barberin told me to put on my cap and follow him. Dreadfully frightened, I turned my eyes toward Mother Barberin to implore her aid. But she made me a secret sign that I was to obey, and at the same moment a gesture of her hand reassured my fainting spirit. There was, then, nothing to fear. So, without a word of reply, I set out after Barberin.

It is a long way from our house to the village — an hour's walk, at least. The whole time passed without Barberin's saying a word to me. He shuffled along in front of me, with hobbling gait, but without a single movement of his head. From time to time he would turn his whole body around to make sure that I was following.

Where was he taking me?

This was a disturbing thought, in spite of the reassuring gesture which Mother Barberin had made. And, to avoid a danger which I sensed without knowing what it

was, I planned to run away. To this end, I tried to lag behind. When I was far enough distant I would throw myself into a ditch where he would not be able to follow.

Along at first he had contented himself with telling me to walk in his footsteps. But after a while he must have guessed my intention, for he grasped me by the wrist. Thereafter I had to keep right up with him.

In this way we made our entrance into the village, and every one who was out on the street turned his head to watch us go by, for I had all the air of a snarling dog that is being dragged along by a rope.

As we were passing the tavern a man who was standing on the threshold called to Barberin and bade him come in. The latter took me by the ear and made me precede him. After we had entered he closed the door.

I felt quite relieved. The tavern did not seem a dangerous sort of place. And then, besides, I had wanted for ever so long to open the tavern's door to see what it was like inside.

The barroom of the Inn of Our Lady! What could that be like? How often I had asked myself that question! I had seen people leaving the barroom with their faces alight and their legs tottering. Often, as I walked by the tavern, I had heard loud cries and singing that made the windows rattle. What was going on inside there? What did they do behind those red curtains? At last I was going to find out.

Barberin sat down at a table with the proprietor, who had invited him in. I found a place near the fireplace and looked about me.

In the corner across from the one I occupied a tall old man with a long white beard was sitting. He wore strange clothes, such as I had never seen before. His hair fell in long locks to his shoulders. He wore a tall hat of gray felt, decked out with green and red feathers. A sheepskin, with the fleece on the inner side, inclosed his body. This skin was without sleeves, but his arms, thrust through two holes at the shoulders, were clad in a velvet material which once upon a time had been blue. Baggy woolen gaiters reached to his knees, and were held in place by interlaced red ribbons which ran around his legs several times. He sat stretched out in his chair, his chin supported by his right hand, his elbow resting on the arm of the chair. I had never seen a living being in so calm an attitude. He looked for all the world like one of the wooden saints in our church.

Crouched under his chair, three dogs were enjoying the warmth, motionless: a white spaniel, a black poodle, and a small gray dog with a look at once knowing and gentle. The spaniel wore an old policeman's helmet held under its chin by a leather strap.

While I was looking at the old man with astonishment, Barberin and the proprietor of the barroom were chatting in a low tone, and I knew they were talking about me. Barberin was telling how he had come to the village to take me to the mayor. He wanted the latter to ask the trustees of the Home to pay him a sum of money for my keep.

That, then, was the promise that Mother Barberin had been able to extract from her husband. And all of

a sudden I understood that, if Barberin found it to his advantage to keep me in his home, I should have nothing further to worry about.

The old man, without appearing to, was also listening to what was being said. Suddenly, stretching out his right hand toward me, he addressed Barberin. "Is that child over there the one who is in the way?" He spoke with a foreign accent.

"That's the one."

"And you think the trustees of your provincial asylum will pay you to adopt him?"

"Of course! Since he's got no relatives and is being supported by me, it's only right that somebody pays for him. That seems to me a reasonable thing."

"I don't say it isn't. But do you believe a thing is done simply because it's reasonable?"

"As a matter of fact — no!"

"Well, for my part, I doubt whether you ever obtain the allowance you're trying to get."

"All right! Then off to the Home he goes. There's no law I know of that forces me to keep him in my house if I don't want to."

"Some time or other you must have consented to take him in. That means you agreed to look after him."

"All the same, I'm not going to keep him. I'll be rid of him even if I have to put him out into the street."

The old man reflected a moment.

"There might be a way of getting him off your hands right away," he said, "and perhaps you might even make an honest penny by it."

"Show me how, and I'll set up a bottle most willingly."

"Order the bottle, and the bargain is made."

"No fooling?"

"Absolutely none."

The old man left his chair and walked over to sit down by Barberin. It was odd, but when he got up his sheepskin was lifted by a movement that I could not explain. One might almost think he was holding a dog under his left arm.

What was he saying? What was about to happen?

I had followed him with my eyes. I felt terribly excited.

"What you're after," he said, "is to keep this child from eating any more of your bread, eh? Or, if he does continue to eat it, you want somebody else to do the paying?"

"You've hit it exactly. You see —"

"Oh, your reason is none of my business, and I don't care to know it. It's enough for me to know you wish to be rid of the child. If that's the way of it, give him to me. I'll take care of him."

"Give him to you?"

"That's what I said. You want to get rid of him, don't you?"

"Give you a child like that? A boy as fine as that? He's a real pretty lad — just take a look at him!"

"I've had a look."

"Remi, come here to me!"

All of a tremble, I walked up to the table where they sat.

"Come! Don't be afraid," said the old man.

"Look him over," continued Barberin.

"I won't say he's a bad-looking youngster. If he was homely, I'd have no use for him. I don't care for monsters."

"Still, if he was only a monster with two heads, or just a dwarf, why, then I shouldn't —"

"You'd not be talking of sending him to the Home in that case, eh? You know that a freak is a valuable thing, and you can make a fortune out of such a one, either by farming him out or by exhibiting him yourself. But the kid is neither a dwarf nor a freak. He is made just like other people, so he's good for nothing."

"He's all right for working."

"He's too weak."

"Who's weak — that boy? Oh, come off! He's as strong as a man, solid and healthy. Say, just look at his legs! Did you ever see any straighter ones?"

Barberin lifted up my trouser leg.

"Too skinny," said the old man.

"And what about his arms?" continued Barberin.

"They're like his legs. They might do, I suppose, but they wouldn't hold out against exhaustion and poverty."

"What are you talking about? Why, just feel them!"

The old man passed his gaunt hand over my legs, testing them. He shook his head and made a face. I had already been present at a scene of that sort the day the cattle buyer had come to buy our cow. He, too, had poked and pinched. He, too, had shaken his head and

made a face. It was not a good cow, he would be unable to dispose of it. Still he had bought it and led it away.

Was the old man going to buy me and lead me away? O Mother Barberin! O Mother! Alas, she was not there to defend me!

If I had dared, I should have said that only the evening before Barberin himself had complained that I was delicate and didn't have any arms or legs. But I knew that any interruption of mine would only end in my getting well slapped, and so I held my peace.

"He's just a child like any other," said the old man, "and a city brat, to boot. It's a sure thing that he'll never be of any use for work on the farm. Just put him before the plow to goad the steers, you'll see how long he lasts."

"Ten years is my guess."

"Not a single month."

"Just look him over, I tell you."

"Take a look at him yourself."

I was at the end of the table between Barberin and the old man, pushed forward by one and back by the other.

"Well," said the old man after an age of such wrangling, "I guess I'll take him, anyway. Only, make no mistake, I'm not buying him of you. I'm simply renting him. I'll give you twenty francs a year for him."

"Twenty francs, eh?"

"It's a good price, and I pay in advance. That means you'll get your hands on four fine coins of a hundred pennies each, and besides you'll be rid of the youngster."

"But, if I keep him, the Home will pay me ten francs a month."

"Suppose they do, I know what prices are. Add seven francs to the allowance, or even eight, and still you'd have to pay for his food and his care."

"He'd work besides."

"If you thought he was good for anything, you'd not be so anxious to get him off your hands. It's not for the money you get that you people take children from the Home — it's for their work. You make servants of them, who pay you instead of getting paid. Once more I repeat, if that chap was in shape to work for you, you'd keep him fast enough."

"Anyway, I'd always be getting my ten francs a month."

"How do you know? If the Home, instead of letting you have him, should give him to another, you'd whistle for your money. Whereas, with me, you don't run any risk at all. All you have to do is stretch out your hand."

He fumbled in his pocket and drew forth a leather purse, from which he extracted four pieces of silver. He threw these upon the table so that they rang.

"But just think!" cried Barberin. "This child's parents will be along some fine day."

"What of it?"

"Why, there'll be a profit for those who brought him up. If I hadn't counted on that, I should never have taken him in."

That sentence of Barberin's — "If I had not counted on his parents, I should never have taken him in" — made

me detest him a little more than ever. . What a wicked man!

"And it's just because you don't count on his parents' finding him that you are turning him out of your house," said the old man. "Now let me ask you to whom they will apply, these blessed parents, if they ever do show up? They'll go to you, won't they, and not to me whom they don't know anything about?"

"But suppose it is you who finds them?"

"Why, then we'll make a bargain that, if some day the lad really finds his parents, all profits are divided. And I'll give you thirty francs for him."

"Make it forty."

"No. The services he can perform for me aren't worth that."

"And what do you plan to have him do? If it takes good legs, he's got them. If it takes good arms, he's got them. I stick to the price I've named, but still I'm curious to know what he's good for."

The old man looked at Barberin cunningly, while he emptied his glass with slow sips.

"I just want him for company," he said. "I am growing old, and sometimes after a fatiguing day and when the weather is bad I get terribly blue. He will amuse me."

"His legs are surely stout enough for that."

"But no more than they should be. For he'll have to dance and spring and walk. And after he's done those things once, why, he'll have to do them right over again. In other words, he is joining the troupe of Signor Vitalis."

"And where is this fine troupe?"

"Signor Vitalis — that's me. As to this troupe, since you wish to make its acquaintance, I shall show it to you."

Whereupon he opened his sheepskin coat and drew forth a strange animal which he had been holding tight against his chest under his left arm. This was the creature that had several times lifted the sheepskin. But it was not a little dog, as I had imagined.

What could this beast be? Or was it a beast, after all? I couldn't find any name to give this odd creature, which I was seeing for the first time and which I stared at in pure wonder.

It was dressed in a red blouse trimmed with gold braid. The arms and legs were bare, and they were really arms and legs — not just paws. Only these limbs were covered by a black skin and were neither white nor flesh-colored. The head was black, too, and about as big as my clenched fist. The creature's face was broad and short, its nose was turned up at the tip and had flaring nostrils, its lips were yellow. But what struck me more than anything else were the two eyes, very close together, darting here and there like light, brilliant as mirrors.

"What an ugly monkey!" exclaimed Barberin.

That word drew me from my fit of open-mouthed wonder. For, even if I had never seen any monkeys, I had heard talk of them at least. So this wasn't a black baby that confronted me, but a monkey!

"Let me present Mr. Dandiprat, our leading man," said Vitalis. "Dandiprat, my dear fellow, make your bow to company."

Dandiprat raised his closed hand to his lips and threw us each a kiss.

"And now," continued Vitalis, motioning to the white spaniel, "you are to meet another member of the troupe, Signor Cappy. He will consider it an honor to present his friends to the estimable company here assembled."

The spaniel, who until this moment had not given the slightest sign of life, got up quickly when he heard his master's command. Standing up on his hind legs, he crossed his two paws on his chest, and thereafter bowed so low to Vitalis that his police helmet grazed the floor. Having accomplished this graceful act of politeness, he turned to his two comrades and, holding one paw above his heart, with the other one he signaled them to approach.

The two dogs, with their gaze fixed upon their comrade, likewise stood up on their hind legs, and each took a paw of the other one in his own, just as is done in polite society. Then they gravely advanced six steps, retreated three, and bowed to the company.

"The one called Cappy," Vitalis went on, "which is short for Italian *Capitano*, is, as his name indicates, in command of the dogs. He is the most intelligent, and therefore transmits my orders to his fellows. This young dandy with the black wool is Signor Zerbino, or, as we should say, Mr. Sport, a title he merits most thoroughly. As to this young woman of modest mien, her name is Miss Dulcie. She is a charming English girl, and she has by no means stolen her name, which signifies sweetness — it really belongs to her. I have the good fortune to travel through the world with these variously named

artists. And thus I earn my living, good or bad as chance dictates. Cappy!"

The spaniel folded his paws.

"Come here, my dear fellow, I beg of you, and be a little agreeable. The members of my troupe are well-bred people, with whom I always converse most politely. Be kind enough to tell this young man who is staring at you with eyes as round as marbles what time it is."

Cappy unfolded his paws, went up to his master, pushed aside the sheepskin coat, fumbled in his vest pocket, and drew out a big silver watch. He looked at its dial and then barked twice quite distinctly. Then, pausing slightly after these two emphatic barks, he gave vent to three which were much weaker.

This meant, as a matter of fact, that it was a quarter to three.

"Well done, Signor Cappy," said Vitalis, "and thank you. Now let me suggest that you invite Miss Dulcie to favor us by skipping the rope."

Cappy fumbled again in his master's vest pocket and drew out a piece of cord. He made a sign to Sport, and the latter at once took up his place across from him. Cappy then tossed him one end of the cord, and they began to turn it with much dignity. When the rotary motion of the slight rope became regular and steady, Miss Dulcie skipped into the circle of it and began to jump lightly up and down, her gentle eyes fixed upon those of her master.

"You see," he said, "how clever my pupils are. But real intelligence is never valued at its true worth, except

by contrast. That is why I am engaging this lad for my troupe. He will enact the rôle of a simpleton, and the wit of my pupils will be all the better appreciated because of his folly."

"He's to play the part of a fool?" broke in Barberin.

"Yes, and it takes a clever chap to do it," continued Vitalis. "I think the boy won't disappoint me after he has had a few lessons. However, we'll find out soon enough. To begin with, we are going to have a proof of his intelligence right away. If he is wise, he will understand that with Signor Vitalis he has the chance to travel — to see not only France, but other countries as well. He can lead a free life instead of staying at home to tend cattle and tramp every day through the same field from morning to evening. Whereas, if he hasn't any sense, he'll start to cry and whine. And, because Signor Vitalis doesn't like naughty children, he won't take him into his troupe. In which case the naughty boy will be sent to the Home, where he will have hard work and little to eat."

I had sense enough to understand these words. But there is a terribly long way between knowing a thing and being able to carry it out.

To be sure, the pupils of Signor Vitalis had been very funny and comical. Besides, it ought to be good fun to be on the go all the time. But, if I was to follow them around and chum with them, I should have to quit Mother Barberin. Of course, if I refused to go, I very probably couldn't stay with Mother Barberin. I should be sent to the Home.

While I was hesitating, absorbed in my grief, tears standing in my eyes, Vitalis patted my cheek gently with the tips of his fingers.

"Just look," he said, "the child understands what's up, for he isn't shedding a single tear. He has settled it all in that small head of his, and tomorrow —"

"O sir," I cried out, "please let me stay with Mother Barberin, I beg of you!"

But before I could utter another word I was interrupted by a tremendous barking on the part of Cappy. At the same time the dog sprang at the table on which Dandiprat was sitting.

The latter, taking advantage of the instant when everyone's attention was centered upon me, had slyly picked up the wine glass of his master and was about to drain it. But Cappy, who was on watch, had seen the roguery of the monkey, and, like the faithful servitor that he was, had tried to prevent it.

"Master Dandiprat," Vitalis said in severe tones, "you are a greedy fellow and a rascal. "Get down, go to the corner, and stand with your nose to the wall. You, Sport, stand guard over him. And if he moves a muscle, give him a good slap. As for you, Mr. Cappy, you are a good dog. Let's shake on it."

The monkey obeyed without protest, but kept uttering little pitiful cries. The dog, as pleased as Punch, offered a paw to his master.

"And now," continued Vitalis, "let's get back to our business. I am, then, to give you thirty francs."

"No — forty."

A discussion followed, but Vitalis soon interrupted it.

"This sort of thing must be wearying to the child. Suppose he goes into the yard of the tavern to play."

At the same time he made a sign to Barberin.

"Yes, that's it," the latter said, "you run out into the yard. But don't you budge before I call you back, or I'll attend to you."

There was nothing to do but obey. So off I went. I went out to the yard, but didn't feel a bit like playing. I sat down on a stone and started to think things over.

Right while I sat there they were deciding my fate. What would it be? The chill air and my anxiety made me shiver as if with ague.

The argument between Vitalis and Barberin lasted a long time, for over an hour passed before my adopted father came to join me.

At last I saw him appear. He was alone. Was he looking for me in order to hand me over to Vitalis?

"Come on," he said, "we're starting home."

Home? Then I did not have to leave Mother Barberin!

I should have liked to ask questions, but I did not dare, for he seemed to be in a very bad temper.

The way home was traveled in silence. But about ten minutes before we arrived there Barberin, who was walking ahead of me, stopped.

"Let me tell you something," he said, seizing me roughly by the ear. "If you blab a single word of what you've heard today, you'll pay for it. Do you understand me?"

CHAPTER IV

MOTHER BARBERIN'S HOUSE

"Well," demanded Mother Barberin the second we appeared, "what did the mayor say?"

"We didn't see him."

"What's that? You didn't see him?"

"No, I met some friends at the Inn of Our Lady, and when we parted it was too late for our visit. We're going again tomorrow."

So it seemed that Barberin had given up all idea of renting me to the man with the dogs.

On the way home I had asked myself more than once if there was not some trick in this return. But Barberin's last words drove away the doubts that were troubling me. If we were going back to the village next day to see the mayor, it was certain that he had not accepted the proposal of Vitalis.

But, despite his threat of punishment, I should have confided my fears to Mother Barberin if I had been left alone with her a single moment. All the evening, however, her husband did not leave the house. And I had to go to bed without finding the opportunity I was seeking.

I went to sleep, promising myself I would tell her next day. But, alas! when morning came, there was no Mother Barberin to be seen.

"Where's Mama?" I asked.

"She's gone to the village and won't be back until noon."

Without knowing why, I was worried by her absence. She had not said anything the evening before about going to town. Why hadn't she waited for me to go with her if we were going anyway that afternoon? Would she return before we started?

A vague fear oppressed me. I could not think of any danger that threatened me, and yet I had a presentiment of real peril. Barberin kept looking at me in an odd way, and one little calculated to reassure me. Finally I could not bear his glance any longer, and so I stole out into the garden.

This garden was nothing very big, but it meant a good deal to us. For it provided us with almost everything we had to eat, with the exception of wheat: potatoes, beans, cabbages, carrots, and turnips. Although there was not an inch of ground to spare, Mother Barberin had given me a little corner in which I had collected a mass of plants and herbs and ferns. I had gathered these things mornings at the edge of the woods or along the hedges when I was tending the cow. And I had spent long afternoons replanting them in my garden, pell-mell, at random, any way they came.

Of course it was not a beautiful garden, with graveled walks and beds laid out in regular order, filled with rare flowers. Passers-by did not stop in the road to gaze at it over the clipped thorn hedge. But, such as it was, it had the merit and the charm of belonging to me. It was my own property and my creation. I arranged it as my

whim prompted, and whenever I spoke of it (as I did at least twenty times a day) I referred to it as "my garden."

During the preceding summer I had gathered and planted my collection, so now in the spring the living shoots would be emerging from the soil. The earliest kinds had not even awaited the end of winter to shoot forth; the others would follow them in quick succession.

This fact accounts for my curiosity in that vividly exciting moment.

The jonquils had already begun to show their buds, the tips of which were growing yellow. Lilac sprigs were thrusting forth their tender stalks dotted with violet. And from the wrinkled leaves of the primrose bushes buds were peeping out which seemed ready to open.

How would they blossom? That was the great question which led me out to them every day.

But there was another part of my garden which I kept studying with a livelier emotion than mere curiosity — I might almost say with anxiety.

For here I had planted a vegetable which some one had given me and which was practically unknown in our village: Jerusalem artichokes. I had been told that they produced a more mealy fruit than potatoes, for they possessed the flavor of artichoke, turnip, and other vegetables besides. This fine promise had inspired in me the notion of keeping them as a surprise for Mother Barberin. I didn't say anything about this present that had been made me. I simply planted the tubers in my garden. When they first began to spring up, I would let her imagine

they were flowers. Then, some fine day, when they were at last ripe, I should take advantage of her absence to dig the Jerusalem artichokes. I should cook them myself. How could I bring that about? Oh, I did not quite know, but my imagination was not troubled by such a trifle as that I did not understand the art of cookery. And when Mother Barberin should come home to supper, that fine day, I'd serve my dish.

Who would be overcome by surprise? Mother Barberin.

Who would be as happy as could be? Again, Mother Barberin.

Because then we should have a new dish to replace our everlasting potatoes. And Mother Barberin would not have to suffer so for the sale of poor Roussette.

And the inventor of this new dish was I, Remi. I was, then, good for something around the house.

With a plan like that in my head, you can understand how attentive I had to be to my crop of artichokes. Each day I went without fail to take a look at the corner in which I had planted them. And it seemed to me in my impatience as if they never would come through the soil.

I was down on the ground on my knees, supported by my hands, my nose almost grazing the soil, when I heard my name cried in a peevish tone. Barberin was calling me. What could he be wanting? I hastened to run back to the house. What was my surprise to see before the fireplace Vitalis and his dogs!

Instantly I understood what Barberin wanted of me.

Vitalis had come to get me, and that was the reason Barberin had sent his wife to the village that morning — so she could not defend me.

Sure in the belief that I could expect neither succor nor pity from Barberin, I ran to Vitalis.

"Please don't take me away, sir!" I cried. And I burst out sobbing.

"Come, my boy!" he said to me, gently enough, "you won't be any worse off with me. I never whip children, and, besides, you will have the company of my three pupils, who are very amusing. What would there be for you to regret?"

"O Mother Barberin!"

"At any rate, you wouldn't stay here," shouted Barberin, grasping me by the ear so that it hurt. "Choose between this gentleman and the Foundlings' Home."

"No, no! I want Mother Barberin!"

"Oh, you're beginning to weary me to death," exclaimed Barberin, who was working himself up into an awful rage. "If you want to be chased out with a stick, I'll accommodate you."

"This kiddie is grieving for his Mother Barberin," Vitalis said. "That's no reason for whipping him. It's a good sign when a youngster has feelings."

"If you start to pity him, he'll bawl all the harder."

"Now let's get down to business."

With these words, Vitalis threw eight five-franc pieces on the table. With a single sweep of his hand Barberin had them stowed away in his pocket.

"Where's his bundle?" demanded Vitalis.



Instantly Remi knew what Barberin wanted of him

"Right here," answered Barberin, pointing to a blue bandanna handkerchief tied together by its four corners.

Vitalis untied the knots and looked at what the handkerchief contained. There were two of my shirts and a pair of linen breeches.

"That isn't what we agreed upon," objected Vitalis. "You were going to give me his things, and here I find nothing but rags."

"That's every stitch he owns."

"If I should ask the boy, I know he'd say that was a lie. But I am in a hurry and do not wish to quarrel over straws. Come on, my lad. What's your name?"

"Remi."

"Well, then, Remi! Take up your bundle and walk ahead. Cappy! Forward march!"

I put out my hands to him in a pleading gesture, and then to Barberin. But they both turned their heads aside, and I felt Vitalis seize me by the wrist. I had to march, whether or no.

Oh, oh! The poor house! When I stepped over its threshold, I felt as if I were leaving a piece of my skin with it. I looked quickly about me. My eyes, blinded by tears, saw no one from whom I could ask help. The road was empty. There was nobody to be seen in the whole neighborhood.

I started to shriek, "Mama! Mother Barberin!" But there was no response to my cry of anguish, which was ended by a sob that almost choked me.

I had to shuffle along behind Vitalis, who still kept firm hold of my wrist.

"A good trip to you!" cried Barberin.

He went back into the house.

Alas! It was all over and done with.

"Come on, Remi. Strike out, my child," said Vitalis. And he drew me toward him with his arm.

So I had to trot along beside him. Fortunately, he did not hasten his step. I even believe he suited his gait to mine.

The road that we were following zigzagged up the mountain, and at each turn I caught a glimpse of Mother Barberin's house, and each time it looked smaller. I had traveled this road often, and I knew that when we should come to its last turning I could see the house for one last time, and that just as soon as we took a few steps on the level highland there would be no more of it. Then nothing would remain. Before me — the unknown world. Behind me — the house where until that very day I had lived so happily, but to which doubtless I should never return.

Fortunately, the ascent was long. At last, however, by sheer dint of walking, we reached the end of it.

Vitalis still had me by the wrist.

"Would you mind if I took a little rest?" I asked.

"Not in the least, my lad."

And, for the first time since we had left Barberin, he let go of my hand. But at the same moment I saw him glance at Cappy and give the dog a signal that he understood. At once, like a shepherd dog, Cappy left his place at the head of the procession and took up his position behind me. This maneuver gave me definitely to understand what the secret sign had already hinted at: Cappy

was on watch over me. If I made a movement to run away, he would snap at my legs.

I went over to sit down on the grassy parapet. Cappy followed close at my heels. Crouched down on this dizzy mound, I hunted, through my tears, for the house of Mother Barberin.

Below us straggled the valley we had just left, interrupted by meadows and woods. 'Way down at the bottom, apart from all other human habitation, stood the house in which I had been brought up. It was all the more easy to distinguish it in the midst of the trees, because at this moment a thin column of yellow smoke rose from its chimney and went straight up into the still air until it was as high as we were.

Whether it was the illusion of memory or the reality of the moment, I cannot say, but the smoke brought to my nostrils the odor of oak leaves which had dried on the fagots we used for kindling during the winter. It seemed to me I was again in the corner of the hearth on my little bench, my feet thrust into the warm ashes, with the wind drawing down into the chimney and beating the smoke back into my face.

Despite the distance we had come, and the height at which we now were, objects preserved their clear and distinct outlines. Only they were much shrunk in size.

On the rubbish heap I could see our hen running about — the last of her whole family. But she was not so big as usual, and if I had not known her so well I should have taken her for a young pigeon. At the rear of the

house I could see the pear tree with the twisted trunk, which long ago I had turned into a riding-horse. Then, at the side of the brook which traced a tiny white line through the green grass, I could just make out the channel I had had so much trouble in digging in order that it might turn a mill wheel made by my own hands. But this wheel, alas, would persist in not turning, despite all the labor I had lavished upon it.

Everything was in its accustomed place — my barrow, and my plow, fashioned out of a twisted bough, and the hutch in which I raised rabbits (when we had rabbits), and my garden — my beloved garden.

What eyes would see my poor flowers bloom? Who would eat my Jerusalem artichokes? Barberin, perhaps, the wicked Barberin.

One more step on our road, and all that scene would vanish forever.

Suddenly, a long way off on the road that led from the village to our house, I saw a white sunbonnet. It disappeared behind a group of trees, only to reappear almost immediately. The distance was such that I could only distinguish the gleam of the sunbonnet, which was flashing amidst the branches like a spring butterfly of pale hues. But there are moments when the heart sees more clearly and farther than the sharpest eyes. I recognized Mother Barberin. It was she. I felt it was she. I was sure of it.

"Well, laddie," asked Vitalis, "shall we get started again?"

"O sir, won't you please —"

"They told me a lie — you haven't any legs at all. Worn out already, with such a short climb! That doesn't promise very well for the future."

I made no answer to this. I was looking with all my eyes.

It was Mother Barberin — her white sunbonnet — her blue skirt. She was striding along at a great rate, as if she was in a hurry to get back home. When she reached the gate, she thrust it open and walked quickly across the front yard. I sprang to my feet and stood on the edge of the bank, forgetting about Cappy, who at once jumped close to me. Mother Barberin stayed in the house hardly a moment. She ran out of it and went about here and there in the yard, waving her arms frantically before her.

She was looking for me.

I leaned over the edge of the hill and cried at the top of my lungs, "Mama! Mama!"

But my voice was powerless to reach down to her. Nor could it rise above the murmur of the brook. It was lost in mid-air.

"What's the matter with you?" Vitalis asked. "Are you growing crazy?"

Without reply, I kept my eyes fixed on Mother Barberin. But she did not know I was so close to her and never thought of raising her head. She had crossed the yard and returned to the road, where she now stood looking in every direction.

I cried harder than ever, but, as the first time, vainly. Then Vitalis, suspecting the truth, climbed up on the

mound. It did not take him long to make out the white sunbonnet.

"Poor little kiddie!" he said, below his breath.

"Oh, please," I sobbed, encouraged by his words of sympathy, "please let me go back!"

But he took hold of my wrist and made me climb down into the road.

"Seeing you are now rested," he said, "forward march, my boy!"

I tried to wrench myself loose, but he held me firmly.

"Cappy!" he called. "Sport!"

And the two dogs took charge of me, one before, the other behind. I had to follow Vitalis. At the end of several steps I turned my head.

We had passed the crest of the mountain, and I no longer saw either the valley or the house. Far away the bluish hills seemed to mount into the very sky itself. Nothing else was visible. My gaze lost itself in limitless space.

CHAPTER V

ON THE ROAD

Just because a man buys children at forty francs apiece, that does not necessarily mean that he is an ogre and is laying in a provision of fresh meat for eating purposes.

Vitalis didn't want to devour me. And, rarest exception of all among children-buyers, he was not a wicked man. I soon had proof of this.

We were on the very summit of the mountain which separates the Loire basin from that of the Dordogne when he took hold of my wrist again, and almost at once we began to descend its southern slope. We walked along in silence for about a quarter of an hour, and then he let go my arm.

"And now," he said, "trot along good and close to me. And do not forget, if you start to run away, that Cappy and Sport will reach you very quickly. They have sharp teeth."

Escape? I now realized how impossible it would be, and consequently that it would be a foolish thing to try it. I heaved a deep sigh.

"Your little heart is breaking," Vitalis continued. "I understand how you feel and do not blame you for it. Cry as much as ever you want. Only try to remember that I am not carrying you off for your own unhappiness. What would have become of you? You would most

probably be in the Foundlings' Home. The people who have brought you up so far are not your own father and mother. Your mother, as you say, has been good to you and loves you. You are in despair at having to leave her. All that is just as it should be. But remember that she would not have been able to keep you in the face of her husband's dislike. This husband, it may be, is not so harsh as you think him. He is without means to live upon, is crippled, cannot work, and he figures that he cannot die of hunger simply to keep you in food. You may as well understand right away, my lad, that life is quite often a battle in which one does not do what he wants to."

Without doubt, these were words of wisdom, or at any rate of experience. But there was one single fact which at this moment was crying out louder than any words — separation. I should never again see her who had raised me and fondled me, the one I loved — my mother. And this thought stifled me.

Meanwhile I was trotting along beside Vitalis, trying to repeat to myself what he was saying.

"Think over what I have said, laddie," Vitalis repeated several times. "You won't be so awfully unhappy with me."

After we had descended a fairly steep slope, we came to a vast moorland which stretched away, flat and monotonous, as far as the eye could see — not a house, not a tree — an upland covered with russet briars, with here and there great fields of stunted broom plant that waved beneath the ruffling wind.

"You see," Vitalis said to me, stretching his hand out toward the moorland, "that it would be vain to try to run away. You'd be caught at once by Cappy and Sport."

Run away? I no longer thought of such a thing. Besides, where could I go? To what home?

After all, this tall and fine-looking old man with a white beard might not be so terrible as I had at first fancied. Perhaps he would not prove to be a pitiless master.

For a long time we strolled in the midst of desolate solitudes, only leaving the moorlands to set foot upon a heath here and there. And far as we could see in every direction there was nothing to hold the eye except hills which swelled up to barren summits.

It was the first time that I had taken so long a walk at a single stretch and without resting.

My master strode along with swinging strides, carrying Dandiprat on his shoulder or on his knapsack. And the dogs did not stray away, but trotted close beside us. From time to time Vitalis spoke an encouraging word to them, now in French, now in some language that I did not understand.

None of my companions seemed to think of weariness. But I was tired out. Physical exhaustion, added to the woes of my spirit, brought me to the end of my resources. I dragged one leg after the other, and soon was hard put to it to keep up with my master. But I did not dare suggest our resting.

"It's your wooden shoes that tire you so," he said. "When we get to Ussel, I'll buy you some leather ones."

These words restored my courage. For, of all things, I had always eagerly desired to own a pair of leather shoes. The mayor's son and the son of the innkeeper had them. And Sunday, when these boys came to mass, they glided noiselessly down the paved aisles, while all the rest of us country lads in our wooden sabots made a deafening racket.

"Is Ussel far away?"

"Ah, there is a cry straight from the heart!" said Vitalis, smiling. "So you really want shoes, my laddie? Well, I'll promise you a pair with nails in the soles. And I'll get you besides velvet breeches, and a vest, and a hat. That ought to dry your tears, I guess, and make your legs good for the six leagues that are ahead of us."

Shoes with nails in the soles! I was dazzled. It was a great thing just to have leather shoes, but when I heard talk of nails I forgot all my woes. Oh, if Mother Barberin could only see me, how happy she would be, and how proud of me!

But, in spite of the shoes and the velvet breeches which were at the end of the six leagues which still remained of our march, it seemed that I could not drag myself so far as that.

Happily, the weather came to my aid. The sky, which had been blue ever since our start, filled little by little with gray clouds. And soon a fine rain began to fall and showed no signs of stopping.

What with his sheepskin coat, Vitalis was well enough protected, and he could shelter Dandiprat, who at the very first drop of rain had promptly retired to his hiding

place. But the dogs and I had nothing to cover us, and before long we were drenched to the skin. Even the dogs could shake themselves from time to time, while I, because I did not have this accomplishment, had to march under a burden that was fast weighing me down and freezing me.

"Do you take cold easily?" my master asked.

"I don't know. I don't remember ever having had a cold."

"That's fine! Decidedly, you are good for something. But I don't want to expose you unnecessarily, so we won't go any farther today. There's a village down below. We'll spend the night there."

But there was no inn in the village, and no one was willing to entertain a tramp who was dragging along a child and three dogs wet through and through.

"You can't come in here," they told us. And they shut the door right in our faces.

We went from one house to another, but no one would admit us. Should we, after all, have to tramp the four leagues that still separated us from Ussel? Night had fallen, the rain was freezing, and my legs felt as stiff as wooden poles.

Oh, for Mother Barberin's house!

At last a peasant, more charitable than his neighbors, agreed to open the door of his barn for us. But before he would let us enter, he imposed the condition that we should get along without a light.

"Give me your matches," he said to Vitalis. "I'll return them to you in the morning."

At least we should have a shelter, and the rain would no longer fall on our bodies.

Vitalis was a man of foresight, who did not start traveling without provisions. In the knapsack that he wore on his shoulders, there was a big loaf of bread, which he divided into four parts. Then for the first time I saw how he secured obedience and maintained discipline in his troupe.

While we had been wandering from door to door, looking for lodgings, Sport had entered one house, only to reappear a moment later with a crust of bread in his jaws. Vitalis had only said, "This evening, Sport!"

I had forgotten about this theft, but I noticed when our master cut the loaf that Sport assumed a dejected air.

We were sitting on two trusses of hay — Vitalis and I side by side, with Dandiprat between us — the three dogs lined up opposite. Cappy and Dulcie had their eyes fixed on their master. Sport stood with drooping ears, his muzzle somewhat lowered.

"The thief will leave the ranks and go to the corner," said Vitalis in a commanding tone. "He goes to bed without his supper."

Sport left his place at once and with cringing gait stole over to hide in the corner Vitalis had pointed out to him. He buried himself from sight under a heap of hay, and we saw no more of him. But we heard him whining plaintively with little muffled cries.

This matter of discipline attended to, Vitalis handed me my bread, and while he was eating his own share he

divided into small mouthfuls the portions intended for Dandiprat, Cappy, and Dulcie.

During the last few months I had lived with Mother Barberin I had certainly not been pampered, but the change in my conditions appeared to be a harsh one, nevertheless. Oh, how good Mother Barberin's hot soup would have tasted now, even without butter in it! How cozy the chimney corner would now seem! And how happy I should be to slip into my warm bed and pull the coverlets 'way up to my nose!

Worn out with fatigue, my feet bleeding from my wooden clogs, I was shivering with cold in my wet clothing.

"Your teeth are chattering," said Vitalis. "Are you cold?"

"A little."

I heard him open his knapsack.

"I haven't a well-furnished wardrobe," he said, "but here is a dry shirt and a waistcoat you can wrap around you after you have taken off your wet garments. Then you can crawl down into the hay, and before you know it you'll be warm and asleep."

But I did not get warm as quickly as Vitalis promised. For a long time I turned and twisted on my couch of hay, too full of pain, too miserable to fall asleep.

Was this the way it would always be? Tramping without rest through the rain, sleeping in a stable, shivering with cold, nothing for supper but a hunk of dry bread, no one to pity me or to love me, no more Mother Barberin — all through the long years?

While I was reflecting thus sadly upon my fate, my heart swelling and my eyes filled with tears, I felt a warm breath pass across my face. I thrust out my hand and met the woolly coat of Cappy. He had stolen gently over to me, had hunted cautiously around in the hay until he had found me. He sniffed a little. His breath was on my face and in my hair. What did he want? Before long he stretched out on the hay close to me, and began daintily to lick my hand.

Quite stirred by this caress, I half raised myself and kissed the tip of his cold nose. He uttered a little muffled bark, placed his paw in my hand, and remained quite still.

At that I forgot my fatigue and my sorrows. My tight throat relaxed. I drew a deep breath. I was no longer alone in the world. I had a friend.

CHAPTER VI

MY FIRST APPEARANCE

The next day we took the road early.

The rain had ceased falling. The sky was blue, and, thanks to a drying wind that had blown during the night, there was almost no mud. The birds were piping joyously in the wayside thickets, and the dogs frisked and capered about us. From time to time Cappy would stand up on his hind legs and bark two or three times straight at me. I knew well enough what that meant — new-found friendship.

"Just keep your nerve," the dogs seemed to be advising me.

Now Cappy was a very shrewd dog who knew many things, among them how to make himself understood. I often heard it said that he lacked nothing human except the power of speech. But I never felt he suffered for that lack. In his tail alone there was more of wit and of eloquence than in the tongue and the eyes of most people. Anyway, from the very start there was never need of speech between us. We each got the other's meaning perfectly.

As I had never been away from my village, I was quite curious to see a town. But, I must confess, Ussel did not stir me much. Its old turreted houses, which would have been the joy of lovers of old things, had no charm for me.

To be quite honest, I must admit that I was seeking neither the unusual nor the beautiful in these houses. One idea filled my brain and blinded my sight: I wished to see but one thing, the shop of a dealer in shoes. Where was the blessed shop that was to furnish them? No other thing was of the slightest interest to me.

Thus, my sole remembrance of Ussel is of a gloomy and smelly store behind the market place. Displayed for sale in front of the shop were some old muskets, a coat trimmed with gold shoulder straps, many lamps, and baskets heaped with padlocks and rusty keys. You had to go down three steps to find your way into the shop. Then you were in a large apartment into which the light of the sun could, I am sure, never have penetrated since the house had been roofed.

How could so lovely and fair a thing as a pair of leather shoes be for sale in so frightful a place?

However, Vitalis knew what he was about in coming to this shop. And very soon I had the happiness of putting my feet into stiff shoes which weighed ten times as much as my wooden clogs.

The generosity of my master did not stop there. After the matter of the shoes was settled, he bought me a vest of blue velvet, woolen trousers, and a felt hat — every last thing he had promised.

Velvet for poor me, who until that moment had never worn anything better than cotton drill — shoes — a hat, although until now my hair had been the sole covering of my head! Decidedly, here was the richest and most generous man in all the world.

It is true that the velvet was crumpled, that the nap of the wool was worn off. It is likewise true that no one could tell just what the original shade of the felt had been, it had made the acquaintance of so much rain and dust. But I was so blinded by this excess of splendors that I did not notice defects hidden beneath their glory.

I was in a hurry to dress up in these fine clothes. But before he let me have them Vitalis had them undergo a transformation which caused me tearful astonishment. When we got back to the inn, he took shears from his knapsack and cut off the two legs of my breeches as high as the knee.

When he saw me staring at him with bewildered eyes, he said, "I am doing this purposely, so you will not look just like every other boy. We are in France, therefore I clothe you in the Italian fashion. If we go to Italy, as we well might, I shall clothe you after the French manner."

As this explanation failed to quiet my wonder, he continued, "What are we, after all? Artists, are we not? Comedians, who must excite curiosity at the very first glance. Do you imagine that, if we went about in public dressed like citizens or peasants, we should make people gape at us and collect around us? Not at all, eh? Learn that in this life appearances are often worth everything. That is an irritating thing, but we cannot change the fact."

That is how it came about that, although I had been a French boy that very morning, before evening I had become an Italian.

As my breeches now reached only to the knee, Vitalis

held up my stockings with red ribbons laced crosswise the length of my legs. He twined other ribbons around my felt hat and adorned it with a bouquet of woolen flowers.

I don't know what others thought of me, but, to be quite frank, I must acknowledge that I thought myself nothing less than superb. And I can hardly have deceived myself as to this important point, for after a prolonged survey of my appearance my friend Cappy offered me his paw with a thoroughly satisfied air.

Cappy's approval of my changed appearance was all the more pleasing to me because while I had been putting on my new garments Dandiprat had taken up his station before me and had imitated my every movement with a comic exaggeration. When I had completed my toilet, he had put his hands on his hips, thrown back his head, and had given utterance to a series of mocking and derisive cries.

I have heard it discussed as an interesting scientific question, whether monkeys really laugh or not. I imagine that those who have expressed doubt in this matter are student-lamp scholars who have never taken the pains to study the subject at first hand. For my own part, after having lived long and intimately with Dandiprat, I can assert that he laughed, and often in a way that was highly mortifying to me. Of course, you could not contend that his laugh was just like a human being's. But none the less, whenever a sentiment of some sort provoked his comic sense, you could see the corners of his mouth draw backward. His eyelids would wrinkle, his jaws would

work spasmodically, and his black eyes would seem to dart sparks, like small coals upon which one was blowing.

What is more, I soon had to observe these characteristic signs of laughter in him under conditions which were pretty painful to my self-conceit.

"Now that you have finished dressing," Vitalis told me, after I had put on my hat, "we will set to work. For tomorrow is market day, and we are to give a grand performance in which you will make your debut."

I asked what it meant, to make one's debut. And Vitalis explained that it was what they called making one's first appearance in public playing a comedy.

"We are giving our first performance tomorrow," he said, "and you will appear in it. It is therefore necessary that I make you letter-perfect in the rôle for which I have cast you."

My round eyes informed him that I still did not understand.

"By the word 'rôle' I mean what you have to do in the piece. I have brought you with me not solely for the pleasure of your companionship — that is a luxury I could not afford. You are to work for your keep. And your work consists in playing a comic scene with the dogs and Dandiprat."

"But I don't know how!" I cried out in terror.

"That's just why I have to teach you. You realize, I suppose, that Cappy would not naturally walk so gracefully on his hind legs, any more than Dulcie would skip rope for her own pleasure. They have had to work hard to acquire these accomplishments, and so have those who

made them such clever comedians. Well, you likewise will have to sweat to learn the rôles you are going to play with them. So let's get down to business."

At this time of my life I had very elementary ideas as to what was work. I thought all labor consisted of digging in the ground, chopping down trees, breaking stone, and I could not imagine any other sort.

"The piece we are going to play," continued Vitalis, "is called *Mr. Dandiprat's Servant* or *The Bigger Fool Is Not the One You Think*. Here is the theme: Until today Mr. Dandiprat has had a servant who has satisfied him perfectly — that's Cappy. But Cappy is growing old, and, besides, Mr. Dandiprat wants a new domestic. Cappy agrees to secure one for his master. But the next servant is not to be a dog, he is to be a lad named Remi."

"Like me?"

"No, not like you, but you yourself. You have just come from your village to enter the service of Dandiprat."

"Monkeys don't have servants."

"Yes, they do, in comedies. Well, you have just turned up in town, and Mr. Dandiprat decides that you look like a fool."

"There's nothing funny about that."

"That makes no difference if it gets a laugh. And now you must persuade yourself that you have really just arrived in a gentleman's house to be his servant, and that he has told you, for instance, to set the table. Here is one such as we use in our play. Come here and arrange the places."

There were on this table some plates, a glass, a knife, a fork, and a white tablecloth.

How should one fix all that?

As I was weighing this question in my mind, I held my arms stiff, hanging down before me. My mouth was open, too, for I did not know where to take hold of things. My master applauded me and burst out laughing.

"Bravo!" he cried. "That's the way! That's perfect. The play of expression on your face is excellent. The boy I had before you put on a shrewd look, and his manner said clearly, 'You'll just see how well I can play the fool.' You say nothing about fools — you are one. Your naturalness is admirable."

"But I don't know what I ought to do."

"That is precisely why you are so excellent. Tomorrow, or in a few days at most, you will know wonderfully just what you have to do. Then you will have to recall the embarrassment which you are experiencing now, and pretend what you actually do not feel. If you can then recollect how you are looking and acting now, I predict the greatest success for you. What are you to impersonate in my comedy? You enact the rôle of a young peasant who has seen nothing and knows less. He comes to a monkey's house and at once shows that he is more ignorant and awkward than this monkey. That's the idea conveyed in my title, *The Bigger Fool Is Not the One You Think*. Your part demands that you be more foolish than Dandiprat. To play it to perfection, you need only stay the way you are at this moment. But, as that is impossible, you have to recall what you have been,

you have to become by an artistic effort what you are not naturally."

Mr. Dandiprat's Servant was not a long play. Its presentation did not last more than twenty minutes. But because of our repetitions we took almost three hours to finish it. Vitalis made us go over the same thing from two to ten times, the dogs as well as me.

I was much surprised to see the patience and gentleness of our master. That was not the way they treated animals in my village, where oaths and blows were the sole methods of teaching.

But, no matter how long it took to do a thing, he never grew angry a single time. And not once did he curse.

"Come, let's begin again," he would say severely, when we did not succeed in doing what we were told. "That's bad, Cappy. You are not paying attention, Dandiprat, you will be scolded."

And that was all, but still it was enough.

"Well," he said to me, when the rehearsal was over, "do you think you'll get accustomed to being a play-actor?"

"I don't know."

"Does it weary you?"

"Oh, no, I find it fun."

"Then everything will go all right. With attention and patience one can attain any result. Compare my dogs with Dandiprat, for instance. The latter has perhaps more animation and intelligence than they, but he lacks their patience. He learns easily whatever is taught him, but he forgets it again right away. Besides, he never

likes to do what he is told. He prefers to be contrary. That is his nature, and now you see why I do not get angry with him. Monkeys haven't the same sense of duty as dogs, and are much inferior to them for just that reason. Do you understand?"

"I think so."

"Always be attentive and patient, my lad. Whatever you have to do, do it the best you can. Don't ever forget that."

Because we were chatting in such a friendly way, I made bold to tell him that the one thing that had most astonished me during the rehearsal was the unvarying patience he had shown to us.

"It is evident," he said, with a gentle smile, "that until now you have lived only with peasants, who are harsh toward animals and who think the only way to make them mind is to hold a stick over them."

"Mama Barberin was very tender of our cow Roussette," I said.

"She was right," he replied. "You gain little by being brutal. You gain much more, if not quite everything, by being kind. I have made my animals what they are by never being unkind to them. If I had whipped them, they would always be afraid, and fear paralyzes the mind. What is more, if I were forever yielding to fits of temper, I could not have learned that patience which has gained me your trust. He who teaches others is taught himself. My dogs have given me as many lessons as they have received from me. I have developed their intelligence; they have formed my character."

What he said seemed so strange to me that I just had to laugh.

"You think it's funny for a dog to give lessons to a man?" he asked. "And yet nothing is truer. You see, the master who undertakes the education of a dog is obliged to keep strict watch over himself. For the dog is almost always the mirror of his master. Show me the one, and I'll show you the other. The ruffian has a dog that is a scoundrel — the thief, a thieving dog — the stupid peasant, a boorish beast — the gentleman a kindly animal."

My comrades, the dogs and the monkey, had a great advantage over me. They were accustomed to public performances and could therefore look forward to the next day without fear. They would only have to do once more what they had already done a hundred times, perhaps a thousand times.

But I did not have their calm assurance. What would Vitalis say if I played my rôle badly? What would our audience say? This thought bothered me so, that when I finally dropped off to sleep I dreamed that people were holding their sides with laughter, they were jeering at me so.

And I was terribly nervous, too, the next day when we left our tavern to go to the market place, where the performance was to take place.

Vitalis led the procession, his head high, his chest thrown out. He marked the time with his arms and feet while playing a waltz tune on his metal fife. Behind him came Cappy, upon whose back Mr. Dandiprat was strut-

ting. The monkey was clad in the costume of an English general, his red coat and pantaloons trimmed with gold braid, his cocked hat topped by a large plume. Then, at a respectful distance, Sport and Dulcie walked in single file. Finally, I brought up the rear of the procession, which, thanks to the way our master had spread it out, made quite an impression as it went down the street.

But what attracted more attention even than the splendor of our parade was the piercing notes of the fife. They penetrated to the remotest parts of the houses and aroused the curiosity of the inhabitants of Ussel. People ran to the doors to see us pass; curtains were quickly raised in every window.

A few children had started to follow us, and they were joined by gaping rustics. By the time we had arrived at the market place our numbers had swelled until we were surrounded by a veritable throng.

Our theater was set up in a flash. It consisted of a rope attached to four trees so as to form a long quadrangle, within which we were to give our performance.

The first part of the show was made up of different turns by the dogs. But I have not the least notion of what these turns were, because I was so worried for fear that I should forget my rôle that I kept saying it over and over to myself. All that I remember is that Vitalis had laid aside his fife and had substituted for it a fiddle, on which he was playing accompaniments to the dogs' exercises. At one time these tunes would be quick-step dances, at another gentle and sweet melodies.

When the first part of the show was ended, Cappy

took a wooden bowl between his teeth and, walking on his hind legs, began to make the round of the "honorable gathering." When no pennies fell into the collection bowl, Cappy would stop and set down his burden where it was out of the reach of straying hands. Then he would place his two forepaws upon the miserly spectator, utter two or three sharp barks, and tap a few times on the pocket which refused to contribute. Then the audience would shout out all sorts of joyous suggestions and merry railleries.

"He's a rascal, that spaniel! He knows a well-lined pocket when he sees one."

"You, there, put your hand in your jeans!"

"Stick to it — he'll give you something!"

"No use, my boy — he's not spending money today!"

"He's generous — he'll give you the money your own uncle left you."

But, before Cappy was through, many a penny was brought forth from the depths where it was hiding.

During all this interval Vitalis, without saying a word, but also without taking his eyes off the wooden bowl, continued to play jolly tunes on his fiddle. He beat time by raising and lowering the instrument to mark the pulse of the music.

Cappy soon returned to the side of his master, proudly carrying a bowlful of pennies.

It was now time for Dandiprat and me to tread the boards.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Vitalis, brandishing his bow in one hand and his fiddle in the other, "we are going

to continue the performance with a charming farce entitled *Mr. Dandiprat's Servant* or *The Bigger Fool Is Not the One You Think*. A man like me does not belittle himself by advertising his plays and his actors. But this one thing I tell you: Open your eyes wide, prick up your ears, and be prepared to applaud."

What Vitalis called a charming farce was really a pantomime — that is to say, a piece played with gestures and not with words. Of course, it had to be that way for the very good reason that two of the actors, Dandiprat and Cappy, didn't know how to talk, and the third principal, myself, would have been entirely incapable of uttering two words.

However, to render the acting of his comedians more easily understood, our master accompanied it with a flow of words which prepared the audience for the scenes of the play and explained them.

Softly playing a martial air, he announced the entrance of Mr. Dandiprat, an English general who had won his rank and his fortune in the Indian wars. Up to this time Mr. Dandiprat had kept but one servant, named Cappy, but now he wished to be waited upon by a man, since his means permitted him this extravagance. Beasts had been the slaves of men long enough; it was high time that this situation was changed.

While he was waiting for the servant to arrive, General Dandiprat walked up and down the stage, smoking his cigar. You should have seen how he blew the smoke into the faces of the audience.

He began to grow impatient, did this general, and

rolled his eyes frightfully, like one who is working himself up into a grand rage. He bit his lips and stamped his foot on the ground.

The third stamp of his foot was my cue to make my appearance on the scene, followed by Cappy. If I had forgotten my rôle, the dog would have recalled it to me. For, at the proper moment, he thrust out his paw and introduced me to the presence of the general.

When the latter caught sight of me, he raised his arms aloft in a gesture of despair. What! Was that the servant they were bringing him? Then he walked over and stuck his face into mine, circling about me and shrugging his shoulders. His expression was so droll that everybody burst out laughing. They saw at once that the monkey took me for a perfect imbecile. And the audience agreed with him.

The whole play, of course, was designed to show this imbecility from its every angle — in each scene I was supposed to commit some stupid blunder or other, while Dandiprat was afforded every possible chance to show his intelligence and cleverness.

After having studied me a long while, the general out of pity had me given something to eat.

"The general imagines that when the lad has had some food he will not act so foolishly," Vitalis said. "Let us see about it."

And I seated myself at a small table which was already set. A napkin was lying on my plate. What was I supposed to do with this napkin? Cappy signed to me that I should use it. But how?

After having examined the napkin for a moment, I pretended to blow my nose in it. At this spectacle, the general writhed with laughter, and Cappy, quite upset by my stupidity, rolled over on his back and stuck his four paws straight up in the air.

Seeing that I had made a bad blunder, I studied the napkin anew, wondering what I was expected to do with it.

At last I had an idea. I twisted up the napkin and made a necktie of it.

More laughter from the general; Cappy did a new stage-flop. And so things continued until the general, in his exasperation, dragged me out of my chair, sat down in my place, and ate the luncheon that had been intended for me.

Ah, he knew how to use a table napkin, this general! With what grace he tucked an end of it in a buttonhole of his uniform and spread it out upon his knees! With what elegance he broke his bread and emptied his glass!

But his finicky table manners produced the most irresistible effect when, at the end of his meal, he asked for a toothpick and passed it quickly between his teeth. At that the applause broke out from every side, and the performance ended in a riot of delight. What an intelligent monkey! What an ass of a servant!

On our way back to the tavern Vitalis praised my playing. And by this time I was so thoroughly an actor that I was proud of this praise.

CHAPTER VII

I LEARN TO READ

The comedians who composed the troupe of Signor Vitalis were assuredly very talented — I am thinking of the dogs and the monkey — but their gifts were limited.

When they had given three or four performances, their stock of business was quite exhausted. They could thereafter only repeat. So it was not possible for us to stay long in one town.

Three days after our arrival in Ussel we began our wanderings again.

"Where are we off to now?" I had grown bold enough to permit of such questioning of my master.

"Do you know this country?" he replied, looking at me.

"No."

"Then why do you want to know where we are headed?"

"Oh, just because."

"Because what?"

I was abashed and, not finding anything to say, I stared at the white road which stretched away before us to the bottom of a wooded valley.

"You don't know how to read, do you?" he asked me then.

"No."

"Do you know what a book is?"

"Yes. People carry books to mass to say their prayers from when they're not telling their beads."

"Right you are! Then you understand that they can put prayers in a book."

"Yes."

"They can put other things in it, too. I am going to show you when we take a rest a book in which we shall find the names and the history of the countries where we are going to travel."

I had been brought up like a veritable savage who has no idea of civilized life. The words of Vitalis were a sort of revelation to me, confused at first, but becoming clearer little by little. It is true that I had been sent to school, but it had been for only one month. And during that period they had never put a book in my hands, they had never said a word to me about reading or writing, they had not given me a lesson of any sort whatsoever.

At the time of which I write, there were a large number of communities in France which had no schools at all. And, among those schools which actually did exist, there were some which were intrusted to teachers who, either because they were ignorant or because they had other things to do, gave no instruction to the children in their care. They simply kept the children from mischief, believing that was the main thing, after all.

That was the case with the teacher of our village school. Did he know anything? Possibly — and I do not wish to accuse him directly of ignorance. But the truth is that, during the month in which I remained in his care, he gave neither my comrades nor me the tiniest

lesson. By trade he was a maker of wooden shoes, and from morning until night you could see him fairly surrounded by the beech and walnut shavings, the result of his unremitting labor. He never said a word to us, unless it was to talk of our parents, of the cold weather, or the rain — never by any chance a syllable about reading or arithmetic. He depended on his daughter for such things, since she was permitted to replace him and to do the teaching. But as she, in her turn, was by trade a seamstress, she imitated her father, and while he was busied with his plane or his spoon-knife, she was equally active with her needle. So I had learned absolutely nothing in school, not even my letters.

“Is it hard to read?” I asked.

“It is hard for those who have a thick head.”

“I don’t know what my head is like, but if you’d teach me I should try to learn all I could.”

“Well, we’ll see. We have time enough before us.”

Time enough before us! Then why should we not start at once? I had no idea of how difficult it was to learn to read. I imagined I had only to open a book to discover all it contained.

The next day, as we were tramping along, I saw my master bend down and pick up a piece of wood that was half buried in the dust of the road.

“Here is the book in which you are going to learn to read,” he said to me.

It was nothing but a well-polished piece of beech wood, as long as my arm and as broad as my two hands. There was no inscription on it, no drawing of any kind.

"Just wait, my lad, until we have reached that group of trees down there," Vitalis said. "We'll rest our feet, and I'll show you how I can teach you reading with that piece of wood."

We soon arrived at the trees he had indicated. We set our sacks down on the ground and seated ourselves on the turf, which was just beginning to get green and from which Easter daisies lifted up their heads here and there. Dandiprat, freed of his chain, jumped into one of the trees and shook its branches one after the other, as if to make nuts fall. The dogs, of a calmer temper and, besides, being more tired than the monkey, lay down around us.

Then Vitalis drew his knife from his pocket and set himself to cut from the plank as small a slice of wood as possible. When he had done this, he polished the two surfaces of the sliver of wood, and then divided it into small squares so that it gave him a dozen or more small pieces of equal size.

"Tomorrow, on each of these little pieces of wood," he told me, "I am going to scratch with the point of my knife a letter of the alphabet. You will thus learn the form of the letters. And when you know them so you can recognize them at sight without a mistake, you can put them together so as to form words. Then, when you are able to form the words I give you, you will be in shape to read in a book."

Soon I had my pockets filled with a collection of small pieces of wood, and I was not slow in learning the letters of the alphabet. But it was another thing, that learning

how to read! I made very slow progress, and it was not long before I regretted ever having made the attempt.

I must say, however, in justice to myself, that it was not laziness which inspired my regret — it was pride.

Vitalis had conceived the idea of teaching the letters to Cappy at the same time that he was instructing me. Since the dog had known how to get the figures of a watch dial into his head, why could letters not be put in the same place? Of course, Cappy could not name the letters which he saw, for he did not possess the power of speech. Still, when our pieces of wood were spread out on the grass, he could indicate with his paw the letters which our master called off.

At first I made much more rapid progress than he did. But if my mind was the quicker, his memory was the more sure. If a thing was taught him thoroughly, he always remembered it. He did not forget, and because he paid strict attention he never hesitated or made a mistake.

Thus, whenever I was guilty of a slip, our master would never fail to remark, "Cappy will know how to read before Remi does."

At such a time the dog, apparently understanding what was being said, would wag his tail with a triumphant air.

"More stupid than a silly animal," Vitalis would continue. "That is fun in a comedy, but in real life it is shameful."

That would sting me so that I would apply myself to the lesson with all my heart. And thus, while the poor

dog could get no farther than to spell his name by indicating the five letters which composed it, choosing them from among all the letters of the alphabet, I at last got so that I could read in a book.

"Now that you have learned how to read print," Vitalis asked me, "would you like to know how to read music?"

"If I knew how to read music, could I sing like you?"

(Vitalis would sing at times, and it certainly was a real treat for me to listen to him.)

"So you'd like to sing like me?"

"Oh, not like you — I know that would be beyond my powers. But yet I'd like to be able to sing a little."

"You enjoy hearing me sing, then?"

"More than anything else. The nightingale sings beautifully, but it seems to me you sing much better. When you sing, you make me do whatever you want to — I feel like crying and I feel like laughing. And now I'm going to say something that sounds stupid: When you sing a gentle or a sad melody, I think at once of Mother Barberin. I see her sitting in our house, although I can't understand a single word you sing, for they are all Italian."

I was looking at him as I spoke, and it seemed to me that I saw his eyes fill with tears. So I stopped and asked him if I hurt him by talking this way.

"No, my child," he said, in a trembling voice, "you do not hurt me. Quite the contrary. You take me back to the days of my youth, to my golden hours. Rest easy, I shall teach you to sing. And since you have a heart

full of sympathy, you, too, will make people weep and will be applauded — see if you don't."

Then he grew suddenly still, and I realized that he did not wish me to talk about the subject any longer. But the reasons for this I could not guess. I learned them much later, and under circumstances which were sad, even terrible, for me. I shall tell what they were when I come to them in my story.

Next day my master made for music what he had already made for reading; that is to say, he began anew to cut out small squares of wood, which he scratched with the point of his knife.

But this time his work was much harder, for the various necessary signs were much more complicated than the letters of the alphabet.

After he had given me a few lessons in reading music, Vitalis, so patient with his dogs, frequently grew vexed with me.

"When I am teaching a beast," he cried, "I control myself, for I know he is a dumb creature, but you will be the death of me!"

And then, raising his hands aloft with a dramatic gesture, he brought them down again to slap his thighs loudly. Dandiprat, who took delight in imitating anything that he thought comic, copied this gesture. And as the monkey was present at all of my lessons, I had the humiliation, every time I hesitated over a note, of seeing the animal raise his arms aloft and bring them down with a loud slap upon his thighs.

"Even Dandiprat is mocking you!" Vitalis would cry.

If I had dared, I would have replied that the beast was mimicking the master as much as the pupil, but fortunately respect, as well as a certain undefined fear, always kept me from such a retort.

Finally the first steps were more or less successfully past, and I had the satisfaction of singing accurately a melody that Vitalis had written down on a sheet of paper.

That day my master did not slap his thighs, but instead he patted me a couple of times on the cheeks and declared that if I stuck to it I should certainly become a great singer.

CHAPTER VIII

OVER HILL AND VALE

We had been traveling through a part of southern France — Auvergne, Velay, Vivarais, Quercy, Rouergue, the Cevennes, and Languedoc.

Living with my master, as I did, in the open air, roughing it most of the time, my legs and arms grew as hard as iron, my lungs developed, my skin became tough. And I soon was able to endure, without suffering, heat and cold, sunshine and rain, pain, privation, and fatigue of every sort.

And the best thing of all about this apprenticeship of mine was that it fitted me to resist the harsh and crushing blows which more than once in my youth were dealt me.

Our fashion of traveling was quite simple. We tramped at random straight ahead, and whenever we came upon a village which from a distance did not look to be too mean and unimportant, we began our preparations for making a triumphal entry.

At such a time I dressed the dogs, combing Dulcie's hair, helping Sport into his clothes, and sticking a plaster over Cappy's eye so that he could play the rôle of an old soldier. Finally I forced Dandiprat to get into his general's uniform. This was the most difficult part of my task, for the monkey, who knew very well that this costuming was but the prelude to work, resisted my efforts with might and main, and invented the most comical tricks

to prevent me from clothing him. Then I would be compelled to summon Cappy's assistance. And through the latter's watchfulness, through his instinct and shrewdness, we generally managed to defeat the sly dodges of the monkey.

When the troupe was in full regalia, Vitalis would take his fife and, putting us in good marching order, would lead us into the town.

If the number of onlookers who followed our train was sufficient, we would give a performance. If, on the contrary, there were too few stragglers to insure satisfactory receipts, we would continue our journey. In the larger towns we would remain several days, and then Vitalis would give me my mornings off, permitting me to go wherever I cared to. I would always take Cappy with me, not of course in his theatrical make-up, and we would stroll about the streets.

My master, who ordinarily kept a pretty tight rein on me, would thus every now and then leave me to my own devices.

"Because," he said to me, "fate has decreed that you should be wandering through France at an age when children are usually going to school, you must keep your eyes open, must observe and learn. Whenever you're confused or see something that you don't understand, come straight to me and I can probably satisfy your curiosity. I have not always been director of a troupe of trained dogs, and I have learned many other things in life than what I need to introduce Cappy or Mr. Dandiprat to honorable audiences."

"What, for instance?"

"We will talk about that later. For the time being, it is enough for you to know that a trainer of dogs may have occupied a much more elevated position in the world. At the same time you must also realize that, although you are at the present moment on the lowest rung of life's ladder, you can, if you want to, climb bit by bit to a higher one. That depends somewhat on circumstances, but much more on yourself. Listen to my lessons, hearken to my advice, my child! And later, when you are a man grown, I hope you will look back with tenderness and gratitude upon that poor musician whom you so feared when he carried you away from your adopted mother. I have an idea that our association will not prove to be an unlucky one for you."

What could have been this position of which my master spoke so frequently, with a dignity which was so impressive? This question excited my curiosity and worked upon my imagination. If he had been on a high rung of the ladder of life, how came it that he was now resting on such a lowly one? He pretended that I could rise if I wished to — I who was nobody, who had no family and no one to help me. Then why had he himself come down so far?

We had left behind us the mountains of Auvergne and had come to the limestone plains of Quercy, where the eye meets nothing but barren prairies and thinly wooded flatlands. No landscape is sadder and more empty. There is not a single river, brook, or even pond to be seen. Here and there one stumbles on the rocky

bed of some torrent, but invariably an empty one. The streams have been engulfed in the precipices and have disappeared beneath the earth, from which they rise later to form rivers or flowing wells.

In the midst of this plain, burned up by the drought at the time we were crossing it, there is a large village by the name of Bastide-Murat. We spent the night there in the tavern stable.

In the evening, as we were preparing for bed, Vitalis said, "It was here, in this countryside and probably in this very inn, that a man was born who led thousands of soldiers to their death and who, although he began life as a stable boy, ended as prince and king. His name was Murat. They made a hero of him and called the village after him. I knew him and have had many a talk with him."

I did not mean to interrupt, but an involuntary question escaped my lips.

"When he was a stable boy?"

"No," responded Vitalis with a smile, "when he was a king. This is the first time I have ever come to Bastide. It was in Naples that I knew him, surrounded by his court."

"You have known a king!"

I suppose the tone of my exclamation was rather comical, for my master broke out laughing and kept it up for a long while.

We were sitting on a bench before the stable, our backs leaning against the wall, which was still warm from the heat of the day. In the great sycamore tree that

spread its branches above us the locusts were chirping their monotonous song. Over the roofs of the houses the full moon had just risen and was climbing by gentle stages into the sky. The evening seemed to us all the more soothing because the day had been so scorching.

"Do you feel sleepy?" Vitalis asked me. "Or would you like to hear the story of King Murat?"

"Oh, tell me the story, please do!"

Then he related to me at great length the history of this king, and for several hours we remained on our bench. As he talked, my gaze clung to his face, which the moon was lighting with its pale beams. My! Could all those things be possible, and not only possible, but true?

Up to that time I had had no idea whatever of history. Who could have told me of such things? Not Mother Barberin, surely — she herself did not know what it was. She was born at Chavanon and undoubtedly would die there. For her eyes, the universe was comprised in the strip of land which the horizon inclosed, which was spread out beneath the heights of Mount Audouze.

My master had seen so many things!

What had my master been in his youth? And how could he ever have become what I saw in his old age?

CHAPTER IX

I MEET A GIANT WITH SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS

We had been at Bordeaux and were to go from there to Pau. Our journey took us across that great desert which stretches from the very gates of Bordeaux to the Pyrenees Mountains and which is called Landes.

Although I was not quite so simple as the young mouse of which the fable speaks, who was filled with astonishment, admiration, or fear by everything he saw, nevertheless, at the start of this trip I made a queer mistake which furnished my master with material for laughter and teasing all the way to Pau.

We had left Bordeaux seven or eight days before, and, after having at first followed the banks of the Garonne River, we had abandoned the stream at Langon and had taken the route from Mont-de-Marsan which leads across the bad lands. No more vines, no more meadows, no more orchards — nothing but pine trees and heather. Soon the houses became more infrequent and more wretched. Then we found ourselves in the midst of an immense plain which stretched before us until it was lost in the blue distance, a gently rolling prairie — no cultivated crops, no woodlands, the soil grayish brown far and wide, the wayside lined with velvety moss, desiccated briar roots, and stunted broom.

"We are in Landes," said Vitalis. "We have twenty

or twenty-five leagues to cover through the center of this desert. Put your courage into your legs."

Vitalis had told me that by evening we should reach a village where we could sleep. But darkness was approaching and still we saw nothing to indicate the proximity of this village — no tilled fields, no animals in pastures, nor anywhere the column of smoke which would have announced a habitation.

The hope of arriving at the village early in the evening had caused us to hurry our steps. And even my master, in spite of his long experience with forced marches, admitted he was tired. He wished to take a rest and lie at his ease for a while beside the road.

But, instead of crouching down beside him, I decided to scale a little broom-covered hill a short distance off, for I wished to see whether I could not discover a light somewhere in the plain beyond it.

I called to Cappy to come with me, but the spaniel was himself limp with fatigue, and so he turned a deaf ear to my summons, as he usually did when he did not care to obey me.

"Are you afraid to go alone?" Vitalis asked.

This remark made me resolve not to insist on Cappy's company, and I walked away alone to explore. I had no desire to lay myself open to my master's jokes as to my being a fraidy-cat.

Meanwhile night had fallen. There was no moon, but twinkling stars lit up the sky and threw their rays upon an atmosphere overcast with light mists that interfered with the view.

While walking toward my hill and looking this way and that, I noticed that this hazy half-light gave strange forms to things. I had to reason them out before I could recognize the bushes, the clumps of broom, and especially the few stunted trees which here and there threw out their twisted branches. For from a distance these natural objects seemed to be living creatures who belonged to some fantastic world.

However, I did not hesitate to climb to the very summit of this small knoll. When at last I reached it and gazed around me, I could not see the slightest trace of a light anywhere.

As I beheld nothing that indicated the nearness of a human dwelling, I listened with all my ears, to try to catch a sound of some sort, like the mooing of a cow or the barking of a dog. But stretch my ear as I would, and scarcely breathing so as to hear better, I heard nothing.

Suddenly I began to tremble; the silence of the lonely district frightened me. What was I afraid of? Of the stillness, I suppose, the solitude, and the dark. At any rate, I felt that I was threatened with some danger.

At this very instant, casting a furtive look ahead of me, I perceived some distance away a great shadow moving rapidly above the broom plants. And at the same time I heard a noise like the rustling of branches when one brushes against them.

I tried to persuade myself that my terror was making me see things which did not exist — that what I took to be a shadow was undoubtedly only a tree which I had not noticed before.

But the rustling sound, what was that? There was not a breath of air stirring. The branches, light as they were, did not move of themselves. Either a breeze had stirred them or else some living thing.

A human being? Ah, no! For this great black body which was bearing down upon me could not be a man. It was rather some animal that I did not know, a gigantic bird of the night, or perhaps an immense four-legged spider, whose lank members stood out above the trees and the brake against the pallid sky.

One thing was certain, namely, that this beast mounted on legs of immeasurable length was coming straight at me with amazing strides. I could no longer doubt that it had seen me and was headed for me with intention. This thought caused me to recover the use of my legs, and, with a sudden about-face, I plunged down the slope to rejoin Vitalis.

But, strange to relate, I managed the descent less quickly than I had the climb. I fell into the thick of broom tufts and undergrowth, bumping and scratching myself, held back at every step. While freeing myself from a prickly bush, I found time to cast a glance behind me. The beast was gaining on me and in another moment would have me at its mercy.

Happily, the heather was no longer a tangle of brambles. I was therefore able to run faster across the grass. But, no matter what speed I made, the beast was shortening the distance that lay between us. I no longer needed to turn my head to locate it. I could feel the thing fairly on my back.

I could hardly get my breath, choked as I was by my terror and my mad race. Nevertheless, I put forth one last despairing effort and fell half fainting at the feet of my master. The three dogs meanwhile had sprung to their feet and were barking loudly.

I was able to pant but two words, which I repeated mechanically — "The beast! The beast!"

In the midst of the awful clamor of the dogs I heard all at once a great outburst of laughter. At the same time my master, placing his hand on my shoulder, forced me to look behind me.

"Beast yourself!" he said, laughing. "You're the only dumb brute hereabouts. Look up, I dare you to!"

His mockery, more than his words, recalled me to my senses. I ventured to open my eyes and glance in the direction indicated. The apparition which had frightened the wits out of me had stopped and was standing motionless on the road.

Again, I must confess, I suffered that first moment of repulsion — but I was no longer out on the barren waste, and so I did not yield to the terrifying influence of solitude and silence.

I summoned up my courage and cast a glance at the monster.

Was it an animal? Was it a man? It had the body, head, and arms of a man. The shaggy skin of an animal covered it entirely; also, it was poised on two skinny hind legs five or six feet long.

Although the darkness had thickened, I could distinguish these details. For the great shadow was drawn

in black, like a silhouette, against the sky, where the manifold stars were radiating their pale light.

My master addressed the apparition. "Could you tell me how far we are from a village?" he asked.

It was a man, then, to whom one might speak and hope for a civil answer!

But the only response I could make out was a dry laugh that resembled the cackling of a bird.

What was my astonishment, a few seconds later, when this animal said that there were no houses in the immediate vicinity, but only a sheep ranch, to which he would gladly lead us.

If he could talk like a human being, why did he have paws? If I had dared, I should have gone up to him to examine the material of which those paws were made. But, although he did not seem to me at all savage, I simply did not have the courage. So I picked up my bag and followed my master without uttering a word.

"You see now what frightened you almost out of your growth?" he asked as we plodded along.

"Yes. But still I do not know what it is. Do giants live in this part of the world?"

"Surely. That is, if they are mounted on stilts."

Thereupon he explained to me how the Landes people, in order to traverse their marshes and swamp lands, and not sink into them up to their waists, made use of two long stilts furnished with stirrups into which they thrust their feet.

"And that is how they become giants in the eyes of fearful little boys!"

CHAPTER X

BEFORE THE LAW COURTS

I have a most pleasant recollection of Pau. The wind almost never blew in this city. And, seeing that we remained there the whole winter, spending the days in the streets, the public parks, and the boulevards, it is easy to understand how much I appreciated this advantage.

Through the entire season we had an audience of children who never grew weary of our lean stock of plays, and not once did they cry out, "They're always giving the same old thing!"

For the most part they were English children — stout lads with pink cheeks and pretty lasses with big soft eyes almost as beautiful as those of Dulcie. It was there I first learned to know and like sweet biscuits and other cakes, with which, before leaving home, these pampered children never forgot to stuff their pockets. And they generously divided their goodies with Dandiprat, the dogs, and myself.

But when springtime announced its arrival by warm days, our public began to dwindle, and more than once at the end of a performance children would come up to shake hands and say good-by to Dandiprat and Cappy. They were going back to England.

Soon we should be alone in the public squares, and so it was necessary that we, too, should think of leaving the promenades of the Botanical Garden and the Park.

One morning we again set out on our wandering life. We followed, without any definite goal, the broad highways.

For I don't know how many days and weeks we followed our noses, through the valleys, over the hills, always keeping on our right hand the azure summits of the Pyrenees, so much like massed piles of clouds.

Finally, one evening, we came to a great city situated on the bank of a river in the midst of a fertile plain. Its houses, for the most part extremely ugly, were built of red bricks. The streets were paved with small cobblestones worn to a point, and most uncomfortable to wayfarers who had walked their dozen leagues that day.

My master said this was Toulouse and we should stay there a long while.

As usual, our first care the next morning was to seek out suitable spots for our performances.

We found quite a number of them, for there is no lack of fashionable drives and walks in Toulouse, especially in the part of town just outside the Botanical Gardens. Here there is a beautiful greensward shaded by great trees, to which several broad boulevards lead. We set up our theater in one of these wide avenues and did a big business from the very start.

Unfortunately, the policeman assigned to this particular beat viewed our appearance with displeasure. Perhaps he did not care for dogs, perhaps we were the innocent cause of some disturbance in his daily routine — anyway, he tried to chase us away.

I suppose that people in our walk of life would have

been wise to avoid any quarrel with the law, for any struggle between poor mountebanks and the police is an unequal one. But my master, so patient in most matters, would not yield. Although he was nothing but an old showman with a troupe of performing dogs, he had his full measure of pride. And so he refused to obey the officer who ordered him away.

Whenever my master was unwilling to give way to his anger, he had the habit of carrying his Italian politeness to the extreme. At such a time one might imagine, to listen to his expressions, that he was dealing with very lofty personages.

"The most honorable representative of authority," he said to the agent of police, as he took off his hat and made a low bow, "may be good enough to show me some regulation emanating from said authority, by which it is forbidden for lowly players such as we to exercise their sorry talents in this public park."

The policeman said there was nothing to discuss. Our business was simply to obey.

"By all means," Vitalis replied, "that is my understanding exactly. And I promise to conform to your orders the moment you show me by virtue of what ordinances you issue them."

That day the policeman turned his back upon us, and my master, his hat still in his hand, made an exaggerated bow and followed him with mock respectfulness.

But the next day the officer returned and, vaulting over the rope which inclosed our open-air theater, he strode into the very middle of our performance.

"You'll have to muzzle your dogs," he said roughly to Vitalis.

"Muzzle my dogs!"

"It's a police regulation. You ought to know it."

We had just started to play *The Sick Man Made Well*. And as this was the first performance of this comedy in Toulouse, our audience was breathlessly attentive.

The intervention of the policeman drew immediate protests.

"Don't interrupt!"

"Let 'em finish the show!"

With a single gesture Vitalis asked for silence and got it.

Then, with a sweep of his felt hat so low that its plumes brushed the gravel — his bow was so profound — he walked up to the officer of the law.

"Did I hear the right honorable representative of authority say that I must muzzle my comedians?" he asked.

"Yes. Muzzle them and be quick about it!"

"What? Gag Cappy, Sport, and Dulcie!" cried Vitalis, addressing himself more to his audience than to the policeman. "Why, your Lordship must not think of such a thing! How would the learned physician Cappy, known throughout the entire world, be able to administer his medicines to his patient if the latter should wear a wire cage on the end of his nose? It is through the mouth, sir, permit me to remind you of the fact, that medicine is taken — if it is to prove effective."

An explosion of mad laughter followed this speech.

It was evident that the audience approved of Vitalis. They made fun of the policeman and they were especially amused at the grimaces that Dandiprat was making behind the back of the "representative of authority." The monkey crossed his arms, placed his fists upon his two hips, and then threw back his head in the most delightful imitations of the policeman's attitudes.

The policeman wheeled suddenly around to discover what was so entertaining to the audience. And he caught the monkey standing with his fists on his hips looking like a swaggering bully. For several seconds the man and the beast remained staring at each other, as if each was curious to see which would first lower his eyes.

The squeals of delight that broke from the audience put an end to the scene.

"If your dogs are not muzzled by tomorrow," the policeman shouted, shaking his fist at us, "you'll go to court and tell why to the judge."

As the officer stalked away, Vitalis was almost bent double in an attitude of mock respect. Then the performance went on.

I imagined my master would buy the muzzles for our dogs. But he took no steps to do so, and the evening passed without his saying a single word about his quarrel with the policeman.

At last I made bold to open the subject myself.

"If you don't wish Cappy to break his muzzle tomorrow during the performance," I suggested, "it seems to me it would be a good thing to put it on him beforehand. In that way he might get used to wearing it."

"You don't for a moment think I'm going to put such an iron framework on the dogs!"

"No! But don't you see that the policeman has it in for us?"

"Don't you worry! I'll fix things tomorrow so the policeman won't have me arrested and so that my pupils won't be made too unhappy. From one point of view, it would be good advertising for us to amuse the public a bit. This policeman is sure to increase our box-office receipts, because, without knowing it, he's going to play a comic rôle in the play I'm getting ready for him. This will lend a little variety to our ordinary stock in trade. Tomorrow you and Dandiprat are to go by yourselves to our theater — you put up the ropes and play a few tunes on your harp. When you have collected a respectable audience around you and the policeman has arrived, I'll make my entrance with the dogs. Then the real fun will begin."

I did not fancy the idea of going alone to prepare for our performance. But I was beginning to understand my master's ways and to know just when I could oppose him.

Next day I went to our usual location and stretched the ropes. I had not played more than a few bars of music, when people came thronging up from every direction and crowded into the space that I had marked off.

Recently, especially during our sojourn in Pau, my master had taught me to play on the harp, and I had learned to play a few pieces fairly well. One of these was a Neapolitan ditty that I sang to my own accompaniment and which always got me applause. But on this

day it was not to hear my ditty that the public was crowding against the ropes.

Those who had witnessed yesterday's scene with the policeman had come back and brought their friends with them. They have no great affection for the police in Toulouse, and they were curious to see how the old Italian would manage his affair. When they saw me there alone with Dandiprat, more than one impatient spectator interrupted to ask me whether the old Italian was not coming that day.

"He'll be along any moment now," I said. And I continued to sing.

But it was the officer of the law who arrived first. Dandiprat caught sight of him at once. He placed his arms akimbo, threw back his head, and began to strut up and down before me, with arched back and stiff legs — a most ridiculous gait.

The crowd simply howled with glee at his antics and rewarded them with thunderous applause.

The policeman was put out of countenance and glared at me. This of course redoubled the general hilarity.

I was tempted to laugh myself, but I was too ill at ease. How was all this going to end? When Vitalis came, he would talk back to the policeman. But I was alone, and I confess I did not know what I could do if the officer should order me around.

Dandiprat, who could not be blamed for not realizing the gravity of the situation, was much amused at the policeman's actions. He swaggered along the rope, *inside*, just as the officer did on the outside of it. And every

time the monkey passed me, he would glare back over his shoulder in so droll a way that the audience would double up with laughter.

I did not wish to drive the officer to further frenzy, so I called Dandiprat, but the rascal was by no means inclined to obey. This game was great fun for him, so he continued to trot along in absurd attitudes and dodged every time I tried to seize him.

I don't know just how it happened, but the policeman was probably blinded by his rage and came to think I was setting the monkey upon him — anyway, he jumped quickly over the rope.

Next second he was upon me, and I was half knocked down by a blow of his fist.

When I got up on my feet again and opened my eyes, Vitalis, come from I don't know where, was standing between me and the officer, whom he had seized by the wrist.

"I forbid you to strike that child," he said. "Only a coward would do such a thing."

At this moment my master was superb. He held high, his fine head framed in its white hair, and his face was wrathful and commanding.

It seemed to me that, in the face of this attitude, the policeman would want to sink beneath the ground, but he had no such idea. With a powerful jerk, he wrenched his hand loose, grasped my master by the collar, and pushed him brutally away before him. Vitalis, outraged, drew himself together and raising his right arm struck the officer sharply on the wrist in order to free himself.

"What are you trying to do with us?" Vitalis demanded.

"I'm arresting you, that's what I'm doing. Come with me to the station."

"You did not have to strike this child to carry out your aim," Vitalis responded.

"You come with me, and keep your mouth shut!"

By this time Vitalis had recovered his accustomed coolness. He made no reply except to turn to me and say, "Go back to the inn and stay there with the dogs until I send you word." He had no opportunity to talk further, for the policeman dragged him away.

Thus ended the performance which my master had tried to make so entertaining, but which had so tragic a close.

The first impulse of the dogs had been to follow their master, but Vitalis ordered them to remain behind with me. Accustomed to obey, they retraced their steps. I saw then for the first time that they were muzzled, but, instead of having their noses held by an iron framework or a leather cage, they wore nothing but a dainty ribbon of silk knotted with bows around their snouts. For Cappy, who had a white coat, there was a red ribbon; for Sport, who was black, a white piece of silk; Dulcie, who was gray, wore blue. They were stage muzzles.

The crowd had dispersed as quickly as it had gathered. Only a few people had kept their places and were arguing about what had happened.

"The old man was right."

"He was wrong."

"Why did the policeman go and hit the little chap, who hadn't done or said a single thing?"

"It's bad business. The old man won't get off without a jail sentence if the officer swears he resisted arrest."

I went back to the inn very much downhearted and troubled, for I had come to feel a sincere affection for my master, a fondness which increased each day. We lived the same life, were constantly together from morning to night, and frequently shared the same pallet of straw. A father could not have taken greater care of his own child; he had taught me to read, sing, write, and do my lessons in arithmetic. During our long tramps he had always employed his spare time to give me instruction in one thing and another, just as occasion offered. On very cold days he had divided his coverings with me; when the weather was hot, he had always helped me carry part of the luggage it was my business to carry. When we ate our meals, he never gave me the worse piece, keeping the good part for himself — he divided the good and the bad equally between us. Sometimes, it is true, he pulled my ears or gave me a light rap on the head, but these slight reprimands did not make me forget his constant care, his kindly words, and all the many tokens of tenderness he had shown me from the first day of our association to this. He loved me and I loved him.

When should we see each other again?

They had spoken of prison. How long would his sentence last? What should I do while it lasted? How could I support myself? My master was accustomed to carry his whole fortune with him, and he had not had time to

give me any money before being dragged off by the policeman. I had only a few pennies. Would they be sufficient to feed Dandiprat, the dogs, and me?

I spent the next two days in distress, afraid to leave the tavern yard, taking care of the animals, who were themselves very restless and sad.

At last, on the third day, a man came with a letter for me from Vitalis. In this note Vitalis wrote they were keeping him in prison, to be tried the following Saturday on the charge of resisting an officer in pursuit of his duty and committing assault and battery.

"My giving way to my temper," he wrote, "was a mistake that may cost me dearly. Come to my trial; it will be a good lesson for you."

There followed some words of advice as to my conduct. He ended by sending me his love and bidding me kiss the animals for him.

While I was reading this letter, Cappy stood between my legs smelling and snuffing it. And the wagging of his tail indicated that from the scent of the paper he could tell that it had passed through the hands of his master. It was the first time for three days that the dog had shown the slightest sign of animation and joy.

When I made inquiries, I was informed that the correctional court convened at ten o'clock. At nine o'clock, therefore, on the following Saturday, I was standing in front of the courtroom door and was the first to be admitted into the hall. Gradually the great room filled with people, among whom I recognized several who had witnessed the scene with the policeman.

I did not know what sort of thing a trial or a court of law was, but I had a natural fear of both of them. I felt as if I were in danger, even though the whole affair had to deal with my master and not with me. I crawled back of a big stove and cowered there, squeezing close to the wall and making myself as small as I possibly could.

My master's case was not the first to be tried. Some people were brought forward who had been stealing and fighting. They all said they were innocent, but they were all found guilty. At last it was the turn of Vitalis to sit between two policemen on the bench where the other defendants had preceded him.

I was too excited to hear, or at least to understand, what he said at first and what it was they asked him. Besides, I was not listening, I was just staring. I looked at my master, who was now on his feet, his heavy white hair brushed back from his forehead. He seemed like a man ashamed and worried. I looked at the judge who was questioning him.

"So you acknowledge that several times you struck the officer who arrested you?" the judge asked.

"No, your honor, just one blow, and that was to free myself from his grasp. When I arrived on the scene, I saw the policeman hitting the child who accompanies me."

"This child is not your own?"

"No, your honor, but I love him as if he were my own son. When I saw him being mistreated, my anger got the best of me, or perhaps I should better say that I saw in the assailant not a police officer but just a man.

And a natural, thoughtless gesture of protection was the result."

"Well, we'll now hear what the policeman has to say."

The latter related what had happened, but dwelt more upon the way in which he had been mocked and humiliated than upon the blow which he had received.

While he was giving his testimony, Vitalis paid but small attention to it. His gaze kept roving around the room. I knew that it was I he was searching for. So I decided to leave my hiding place and, pushing my way through the spectators, I reached the front row.

He saw me, and his sad face lighted up. I knew he was glad to have me there and, in spite of myself, my eyes filled with tears.

"Is that all that you have to say in your defense?" the judge asked at last.

"I have nothing to add for myself, your honor. But, because of the child whom I love tenderly and who will be left alone, I throw myself upon the mercy of the court and ask that the term of our separation be as short as possible."

I felt sure that they would set my master free. But nothing was farther from their thoughts. Vitalis was condemned to two months in prison and to pay one hundred francs damages.

Two months in prison!

Through my tears I saw the door, from which Vitalis had entered, open again. Led by a policeman, my master disappeared. Then the door was closed behind him.

Two months of separation! Where could I go?

CHAPTER XI

ON A BOAT

When I went back to the inn, my heart like lead, my eyes red with weeping, I found the proprietor standing in the doorway that led to the yard. He gave me a long look.

I was going to pass him, to go find my dogs, but he stopped me.

"Well," he asked, "what about your master?"

"He was sentenced."

"For how long?"

"Two months in prison."

"And how big was the fine?"

"One hundred francs."

"Two months and a hundred francs," he said to himself several times.

I started to pass him again; a second time he stopped me.

"And what are you going to do for these two months?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Ah, you don't know. I suppose you have money enough to keep yourself and the animals?"

"No, sir."

"Do you count on my keeping you all this time?"

"No, sir. I don't count on anybody."

And never had I said a truer thing than that.

"Well, my boy," the innkeeper continued, "the truth is, your master already owes me too much money. I can't give you credit for two months without knowing where my pay is coming from at the end of that time. You'll have to get out."

"But where do you want me to go, sir?"

"That's none of my business. I'm not your father or your master. So why should I look after you?"

I was stunned for a moment. What could I say? The man was right. Why should he give me shelter? I should be nothing but a burden and a care to him.

"Come, my lad, take your dogs and your monkey and light out! And don't forget to leave your master's bag with me. When he gets out of jail, he'll come to look for it, and then we can square our little account."

These words of his suggested an idea, and I thought I had found a way of remaining in the tavern.

"Since you are sure of fixing things when he gets out, keep me until that time and add my expense to the bill."

"Oh, really, my boy! Your master might be able to pay for a few days' lodging, but two months would be another story altogether."

"I'd eat just as little as you wanted me to."

"And how about your animals? No, it just won't go. You'll find work enough to keep you in the villages near by."

"But, sir, where do you suppose my master can find me when he gets out of prison? This is where he'll come to look for me."

"All you have to do is come back the day he is freed."

"But suppose my master writes to me?"

"I'll keep the letter for you."

"But don't you see I can't answer it, then?"

"Oh, you weary me. I say to get out, so off with you, quick as a wink! If I find you here five minutes from now, I'll come out in the yard and you'll have to settle with me."

I saw that further insisting would be useless. I went to the stable to get the dogs and Dandiprat. Then, after I had buckled on my knapsack and passed the strap of my harp over my shoulder, I left the inn.

I was in a great hurry to get out of town because my dogs were not muzzled. How could I explain if I met a policeman? I could only tell the truth — that I didn't have enough money to buy muzzles. I had only eleven pennies in my pocket, and that was not enough for such a purchase. Then I'd be arrested, in my turn. If both my master and I were put in jail, then what would become of the dogs and Dandiprat? I had now got to be director of the company and head of the family — I, the child without a family of his own! I felt my responsibility.

As we trotted quickly along the dogs raised their heads and glanced at me with an air that needed no words to interpret. They were hungry.

Dandiprat, whom I was carrying perched on my bag, tugged at my ear from time to time to attract my attention. Then he would rub his stomach with a gesture which was no less expressive than the steady gaze of the dogs.



"If I find you here five minutes from now you'll have to settle with me," said the innkeeper

I could have talked about hunger, too, for I had had no more breakfast than they. But what good would that do?

My eleven pennies would not be enough to buy us dinner and supper, so we must all content ourselves with one meal. If we ate this in the middle of the day, it would do for two.

I imagine we must have walked about two hours before I dared to call a halt. The dogs kept glancing at me more and more longingly, and Dandiprat tugged at my ear and rubbed his stomach with increasing vigor.

At last we had got far enough away from Toulouse so that I no longer had anything to fear. At least I could say that I would muzzle my dogs the next day if they should order me to. So I entered the first baker's shop that we came to.

There I asked for a loaf of bread weighing a pound and a half.

"You'd better take a two-pound loaf," the baker advised me. "That's not too much for your menagerie. You should feed those poor beasts well."

He was right. A two-pound loaf would not be too much for my menagerie. But it was too much for my pocketbook. For bread at that time was five pennies a pound. And if I bought two pounds of it, they would cost me ten pennies, which would leave me only a single one of my eleven pennies with which to face the future.

Now, I did not consider it wise to permit myself to be drawn into so great a piece of extravagance before I knew what the next day had to offer. So I made a rapid

calculation and said to the baker's wife, with a manner which I tried to make seem indifferent, that a pound and a half of bread would be all I wanted. And I begged her not to cut off any more than that.

We did not go far after I once had my precious bread.

I leaned my harp against the first tree that we came to and stretched myself out on the grass. The dogs took their seat before me: Cappy in the middle, Dulcie on one side, Sport on the other. Dandiprat, of course, was not tired at all; he stood by ready to steal the first pieces that got within his reach.

The dividing of my loaf was a delicate business. I cut the loaf into five parts of almost equal size, and, in order that none of it might be wasted, I separated them again into small slices. Each one received his piece in turn, as if we were eating at a mess.

Dandiprat, who did not need as much food as we others did, was much better off than we were. And his hunger was gone while we were still famished. I took three pieces from his portion and stuffed them into my knapsack in order to give them to the dogs later on. Then, as four morsels still remained, we each had one of them. This was at the same time our extra course and our dessert.

Then the moment seemed to have come when I should address a few words to my comrades. Naturally, I felt myself to be their chief, but I did not feel myself so much above them that I might neglect telling them of the grave situation in which we found ourselves.

Cappy evidently guessed my intention, for he kept his big, intelligent, affectionate eyes unwaveringly upon mine.

"Yes, my friend Cappy," I said, "and my dear other comrades, I have some bad news to tell you. Our master has gone away from us for two months."

"Woof!" barked Cappy.

"That is a sad piece of business for him and for us. It was he who found us our living, and now that he has gone we are in bad shape. We haven't any money."

At this last word, which he understood perfectly, Cappy stood up on his hind legs and began to walk around in a circle, as if he were passing the bowl among the "honorable audience."

"You are suggesting that we give some performances," I continued, "and that sounds like good advice, but should we make anything by following it? If we should not succeed, allow me to inform you that our whole fortune consists of but three sous. It would thus be necessary to stint your appetites."

I dare not say that my companions took in all the beauties of my speech, but certainly they got the general drift of it. Because of our master's absence, they knew that something serious was happening, and they had been awaiting my explanation. If they did not grasp everything I said, they were at least satisfied that I had their best good at heart. And they showed their contentment by the attention they paid me.

When I speak of attention, I am referring only to the dogs, for Dandiprat was unable to keep his mind fixed on the same subject for any length of time. During

the first part of my discourse he had listened to me with every indication of lively interest. But at the end of twenty words he had climbed into the tree which was shading us with its foliage, and he now was amusing himself by springing from one of its branches to another. If Cappy had offered me a similar insult I should have felt offended, but nothing that Dandiprat did astonished me in the least. He was only a madcap, an empty pate, and, after all, what was more natural than that he should wish to have a bit of fun?

I admit I should have enjoyed doing the same thing. But the importance and the dignity of my position did not permit me to spend my energies swinging from limb to limb.

After we had rested a few moments more, I gave the signal for departure. We had to earn our night's lodging, or at any rate our next morning's breakfast, in case, as was likely, we should decide for the sake of economy to spend the night out of doors.

At the end of about an hour's walk we came in sight of a village which seemed to me suitable for the carrying out of our plan. From a distance the place looked wretched enough; consequently the receipts would be meager, but there was nothing in that to discourage me. I was not too particular as to the exact amount of our earnings. And I comforted myself with the thought that the smaller the village, the less likely were we to meet interference on the part of the police.

So I made up my comedians, and in as good order as possible we made our entry into town. Unfortunately,

we were without the fife of Vitalis and without his commanding presence which, like that of a drum major's, always attracted attention. I did not have, as he did, the advantage of height and an expressive head. I was just the opposite, thin and small of stature — and my expression must have been one of worry rather than assurance.

While we were marching in, I looked right and left to see what effect we were producing. It was very little; people raised their eyes, then they lowered them again, but no one followed us.

When we came to a small square in the middle of which was a well shaded by plane trees, I took my harp and began to play a waltz. The music was gay, my fingers were light, but my heart was heavy and sad, for I felt as if I were carrying a very great weight on my shoulders.

I told Sport and Dulcie to waltz with each other. They obeyed me without question and began to whirl about in time with the measure.

But nobody bothered to come and see us, although on the doorsteps I could see women knitting and chatting.

I continued to play; the dogs kept up their dancing.

Perhaps some one might decide to draw near. If one person should come, another might risk it, then ten or twenty others.

But all my playing was in vain — vain the fine dancing of Sport and Dulcie. For the people kept to their houses. They did not even cast a glance in our direction. The situation was desperate.

However, I did not become discouraged. Instead, I

played with greater force than ever, almost causing the strings to snap.

Suddenly a little child, so small that I really think it was taking its first steps, left the step of its mother's home and started toward us. Its mother would follow after it, no doubt — then a woman friend would come. We should soon thereafter have our audience and a paying performance.

I played more softly, not to frighten the child away, but with a view to attracting it. With hands outthrust, balancing uncertainly first on one foot and then on the other, it came slowly forward. A few more steps, and it would be close to us.

The mother raised her head, without doubt surprised and worried not to see the child right beside her. All at once she caught sight of it. But when she did, instead of running after it, as I had hoped, she simply called to it. And the child obediently went back to its proper place.

Perhaps these people did not like dancing — stranger things had happened. So I ordered Sport and Dulcie to lie down and set myself to singing my song. Certainly I had never applied myself to it with greater zeal.

I had just started the second stanza, when I saw approaching a man in a short jacket and with a felt hat on his head.

At last!

I went on singing, now with more enthusiasm.

"Here, you scamp! What are you doing?" he cried.

Stupefied by this manner of address, I stopped singing. I stared at him open-mouthed as he drew nearer.

"Well! Have you got a voice?" he asked.

"You see, sir, I'm only singing."

"Have you got a license to sing on our village green?"

"No, sir."

"Off with you, then, unless you want to be arrested."

"But, sir —"

"Right about face, you wretched little beggar!"

Beggar! Oh, it was not fair to call me that! I had not asked for help of any kind. I had sung and danced; that was the way I earned my living. What was there wrong about that?

Within five minutes I had shaken the dust of this inhospitable village off my feet. It was too well guarded by this rustic constable.

My dogs followed me with lowered heads and melancholy mien, for they knew as well as I that we had met bad luck.

Now and then Cappy would go on ahead of me and then turn around to look at me curiously out of his intelligent eyes. Any other one in his position would have asked me a question, but he was too well brought up to ask indiscreet questions. I saw his jaws quiver from the effort he was making not to break out into rude barking.

When we had got far enough away from the village so that we no longer dreaded the arrival of a brutal rural constable, I waved my hand. And at once the three dogs formed a ring around me, Cappy the central figure, his eyes fixed on mine.

The moment had arrived when I should give them the explanation they awaited.

"We were chased away because we didn't have permission to play," I said.

"Well, what's the next move?" asked Cappy; with a wag of his head.

"The next thing to do is to go to sleep under the stars without our supper. One camping ground is as good as the next."

"Without our supper?"

There was a general growling at this juncture.

I exhibited my three pennies.

"You know this is all we've got left. If we spend our three pennies this evening, we shan't have any money for breakfast tomorrow. Now, as we have had one meal today, I've decided it is wise to think of the day ahead of us." And I thrust the coppers back into my pocket.

Cappy and Dulcie lowered their heads in token of resignation. But Sport, who was not always good and who, moreover, was a greedy soul, continued to growl.

I looked at him sternly but was powerless to make him be silent, so I turned to Cappy and said, "Explain to Sport, please, what he does not seem to wish to understand, namely, that we must do without a second meal today if we wish anything to eat tomorrow."

Cappy tapped Sport with his paw, and a lively discussion seemed to ensue between them.

The word "discussion" may be thought an improper one when applied to two animals. And yet it is a certainty that each kind of beast has a peculiar language of its own. And, besides, dogs know not only how to talk with one another, but how to read, as well. Look at

them when their noses are raised attentively, or when with lowered heads they study the ground, snuffing at stones and bushes. Suddenly they halt before a tuft of grass or a wall and remain motionless for an instant. We do not see a single thing on this wall, but the dogs read on its surface all kinds of curious messages written in some mysterious script invisible to us.

I did not comprehend what Cappy said to Sport. I merely saw that the latter refused to listen to reason and insisted upon spending the three pennies without delay. Quite as a matter of course, Cappy then lost his temper and showed his teeth to his comrade. Sport was a bit of a coward, and so sulkily gave in.

The matter of supper being thus disposed of, there was nothing left to do but go to sleep.

Fortunately, the weather was fine. The day had been hot, and sleeping under the open stars at such a season was no great hardship. It was only necessary to settle ourselves in such a way as to be safe from attack by wolves or from rural constables — these men being a greater source of danger to us than any animals.

There was then nothing to do but walk ahead on the white road until we should come to a good camping place.

When I finally decided to call a halt for the night, we were in a wood which was broken here and there by bare spaces, in the midst of which great blocks of granite reared themselves aloft. The spot was gloomy and deserted, but we could not find a better one. And I thought that amid the granite rocks we might find a shelter from the sharp air of the night. By "we" I refer to Dandiprat

and myself, for there was no danger that the dogs would be the worse for a night in the open. But I had to take good care of my own health, since I realized how heavy a responsibility was mine. What would become of my troupe if I should fall sick? And what on earth could I do if I had a sick Dandiprat on my hands?

So we left the highroad and went far into the heart of the rocks, and before long I had discovered an enormous slab of granite planted crosswise, in such a position as to form a kind of cave at its base and a roof at its top. Into this grotto the winds had swept a thick mattress of dried pine needles. Nothing could have been more suitable: a thick soft bed to lie upon, a ceiling above us for protection. We needed nothing further to comfort us except a piece of bread for supper, but that fact I tried to forget. Besides, does not the proverb say, "He who sleeps, dines"?

Before falling asleep I explained to Cappy that I trusted him to keep watch for us. And the good animal, instead of joining us on our couch of pine needles, remained outside of our lodging as a sentinel. I felt safe now, since I knew that no one could get near us without my being warned of the fact.

Still, although my mind was at rest, I did not go to sleep the moment my head touched the pillow. Dandiprat was next to me, wrapped up in my waistcoat, Sport and Dulcie were curled up at my feet, but my anxiety was stronger than my weariness.

This first day's trip had been bad. What would tomorrow's be like? I was hungry, I was thirsty, and I

had only three pennies. I kept handling them as they lay in my pocket; one, two, three — I never got beyond that figure.

How could I feed my troupe, to say nothing of myself, if I didn't get to give performances tomorrow and the following days? I needed muzzles, or a license to sing, or something else of that kind. Were we all really going to die of hunger here at the edge of the woods beneath a clump of bushes?

It was while such questions and doubts were stirring in my mind that I studied the stars in the dark sky above me. There was not a sigh of wind stirring. Silence everywhere, not the slightest rustling of leaves, not the call of a lonely bird, not the sound of a rumbling cart wheel out on the highroad. Emptiness — as far as I could see into the purplish gloom. How utterly alone we were! How forsaken by all humankind!

I felt my eyes fill with tears, and then — before I realized it — I was weeping. Poor Mother Barberin! Poor Vitalis!

I was lying on my empty stomach, sobbing into my cupped hands, when I felt a warm breath graze my hair. I turned over quickly. It was Cappy who had heard me crying and had come to comfort me, just as he had done when he came to my aid the first night out on the road months before.

I put my two arms around his neck and kissed his moist muzzle. He muttered two or three muffled growlings — it almost seemed as if he were mingling his tears with mine.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and I found Cappy seated beside me, studying me. The birds were piping merrily from their bowers. Far, far away, I could hear a church bell ringing for morning prayers. The sun, already high in the heavens, was shedding its warm and comforting rays that strengthened the heart as well as the body.

Our morning toilet was soon made, and we set forth, striking out in the direction where the church chimes had sounded. There would be a village and a bakeshop. When a fellow has gone to bed minus dinner and supper, hunger gets up early in the day.

I had made my decision. I was going to spend my three pennies. And after that — well, we should see.

When we got to the village, we did not have to ask where the baker lived — our nose was a guide to be trusted. My sense of smell was almost as good as that of my dogs when it came to scenting hot bread.

Three pennyworth of bread, when it costs five pennies a pound, did not give any one of us more than a morsel, and our morning meal was all too quickly over.

The moment had now come to spy out a way by which we could make some money during the forenoon. To this end, I set forth to walk through the village in search of the most favorable place in which to give a performance. Nor did I fail to examine the faces of the people in an attempt to guess whether they would be hostile or friendly to us.

It was not my plan to start the show at once, for the hour was not suitable. I had it in mind rather to study

the lie of the land, to select the best situation, and then to return there at midday to tempt our fate.

I was all wrapped up in this idea, when suddenly I heard cries behind me. I wheeled quickly about and saw Sport flying along, pursued by an old woman. It did not take me long to discover the reason for this flight and the yelling. Profiting by my absent-mindedness, Sport had sneaked away from me, crept into a house, and stolen a piece of meat which he was carrying off in his jaws.

"Stop, thief!" shrieked the old woman. "Catch him — catch them all!"

When I heard her cries, I somehow felt that I was guilty. Or, perhaps, it is better to say that I felt responsible for the fault of my dog. And so I started to run away, too. What answer could I give if the old woman should ask me to repay her for the piece of stolen meat? With what could I pay her? If they once arrested us, they would not let us go easily.

The moment they saw me running, Cappy and Dulcie did not permit the grass to grow under their feet. I could tell they were right on my heels. Dandiprat, who was riding on my shoulder, clasped me closely around the neck to avoid falling.

I was not afraid that they would catch up with us when we tried to rejoin one another, but that they might bar our passage. And it actually seemed as if two or three people were trying to shut the road to us. Fortunately, a cross lane led off from the highway before we got to the group of our enemies. I struck into this, with the dogs close beside me, and, running at top speed, we

were soon out in the open country. I stopped when my breath failed me, which means after half a mile or so. Then for the first time I risked turning around for a glance behind me. No one was in pursuit.

I said to Cappy, "Go and find Sport for me!"

The dog left immediately to do what I told him to. But somehow it seemed as if he fulfilled his mission with less zeal than usual. He threw me a look which seemed to say that he would rather stand up for Sport than act as the policeman who was to bring him back to me for deserved punishment.

I was really in no hurry for the return of Cappy and his prisoner. I was tired enough to be glad to lie down and rest a while. Besides, we were in no haste, for there was no place we knew to go to, and there was nothing special to do.

An hour slipped away without my seeing hide or hair of either of the dogs. And I was just beginning to worry, when Cappy put in an appearance, all by himself, with lowered head.

"Where is Sport?" I demanded.

Cappy crouched down as if he were afraid of being struck. When I took a second look at him, I saw that one of his ears was bleeding. I knew without asking what had happened: Sport had objected to being arrested. He had started to fight. And Cappy, firm in the faith that I had given him too harsh a command, had let himself be trounced.

Should I scold Cappy and whip him for not carrying out my orders? I really did not have the heart for it.

There was only one thing left to do — to wait for Sport until he was pleased to return of his own accord.

I stretched out full-length under a tree, hugging Dandiprat tightly to me lest he should take it into his head to run away and join the missing Sport. Cappy and Dulcie lay at my feet. Time passed by, almost unheeded. Little by little, without my noticing it, slumber crept upon me and I slept.

When I finally awoke, the sun was shining above my head and the day was well advanced. But I did not need the rays of the sun to remind me that many hours had slipped by unheeded, for my stomach was crying out that it was long since I had had a bite to eat. The piteous looks of my companions showed clearly enough how hungry they were. But Sport was nowhere to be seen.

I called our missing comrade, I whistled for him, but in vain. Cappy started out again to look for him, but returned empty-handed at the end of half an hour. What was there to do?

Sport was at fault, there was no denying that. And his folly had put us in an awful position. But still I could not make up my mind to desert him. What would my master say if I did not return to him his three dogs? And then, in spite of all his evil-doing, I loved this rascally animal.

I decided to wait until evening. But to loaf through the rest of the day without stirring a foot, while our empty stomachs cried out against hunger — that was a thing not to be thought of. We must think up something to occupy the four of us and distract our minds. Any-

thing was good enough, just so long as it made us forget our emptiness. What should we attempt?

Suddenly I remembered what Vitalis had told me about soldiers in wartime. When a regiment was worn out by a long march, they had the band play its gayest and most irresistible pieces, so that the men might forget their fatigue. If I should play a merry melody, perhaps we might all forget our hunger. So I reached for my harp, which had been leaning against a tree, I turned my back to the canal, on the green bank of which we had been resting, placed my little comedians in the proper position for dancing, and struck up a right jolly air for a quickstep that soon turned into a waltz.

At first my actors did not seem much disposed to execute a dance. Their actions showed clearly enough that their chief concern was a slice of bread. But gradually they became more lively, as the music had its effect on them, and none of us longer thought of anything except the playing and the hopping about.

It was then that I heard an unexpected voice, the clear voice of a child crying out, "Bravo!" The sound seemed to come from behind me. I turned quickly around. A house boat had halted in the canal, its prow pointed toward the bank on which we were performing. The two horses that were towing the barge stood on the opposite shore.

It was the strangest boat that I had ever seen. It was quite a little shorter than the shallops that I had previously met navigating the canal, and on its deck which was raised just above the water was constructed a sort

of glassed-in gallery or sun-parlor. In front of this was a porch shaded by creeping vines, and here I could see two people. A lady still young, with a high-bred, sad face, was standing erect. A child, a boy about my own age apparently, was lying down. Without doubt it was this youngster who had called out to me, "Bravo!"

I had soon recovered from my surprise, for after all there was nothing terrifying about this apparition. I swung my hat in the air to thank him for his applause.

"Are you playing for your own pleasure?" the lady asked me, speaking French with a foreign accent.

"Oh, no! I am rehearsing my comedians, and then, too, it takes my mind off things."

The child beckoned to the lady, and she bent over him.

"Would you play again?" the lady asked me, as she raised her head.

Would I! Play for an audience that had arrived at so fortunate a moment! I did not wait for a second invitation.

"Which do you want — a dance or a comedy?" I said.

"Oh! A comedy of course!" cried the child. But the lady interrupted to say that she would prefer a dance.

"A dance is so short," pouted the child.

"After the dance," I said, to comfort him, "we can present our different pieces, if the honorable audience so desires — just like those in the circuses of Paris."

This was one of my master's phrases, and I tried to speak it with a manner as noble as his own. As I thought it over I was glad that the lady had voted against the comedy, for I should certainly have been embarrassed in

trying to perform it, since Sport was missing and I had neither the costumes nor the other necessary stage properties with me.

So I took up my harp and began to play a waltz. Cappy at once put his two paws around Dulcie's waist, and they began to wheel about, keeping perfect step. Then Dandiprat danced a turn all by himself. Afterward we went through our whole repertory of tricks without feeling the least fatigue. My comedians had surely guessed that a meal was to repay their efforts, and they did not spare themselves any more than I did.

All of a sudden, in the midst of one of my exercises, I beheld Sport coming out from a thicket. And when his comrades were passing close to him, he placed himself boldly among them and took up his rôle.

All the time I was playing and keeping an eye on my comedians, I would glance now and then at the young boy. And, strangely enough, although he seemed to be delighted with our performance, he never moved a muscle. He remained lying stretched out at full length, absolutely motionless except when he raised his hands to applaud.

Could he be paralyzed? It seemed as if he were fastened to the bed on which he was lying.

Little by little the wind had driven the barge against the bank where I was standing, and I could now see the child as plainly as if I were on the boat itself and right beside him. He had blond hair. His face was so white that one could see the blue veins in his forehead beneath his transparent skin. His expression was sweet and sad, with something sickly about it.

"What do you charge for seats at your theater?" the lady asked.

"You pay according to the pleasure you have had."

"Then, Mama, we'll have to pay a lot," the child said. He added some words in a language I did not understand.

"Arthur wants to see your actors close by," the lady said.

I made a sign to Cappy. He took a running start and sprang on to the boat.

"And the other ones, too!" cried Arthur.

Sport and Dulcie followed their comrade's lead.

"And the monkey!"

Dandiprat could have made the leap easily, but I was never sure of how he would act. Once on board, he might indulge in fooling that was not at all to the lady's taste.

"Is he naughty?" she asked.

"No, Madame, but he does not always obey. And I am afraid he may not act properly."

"Then why don't you come aboard with him?"

With these words she made a sign to a man who was in the stern of the boat at the tiller. This fellow came forward at once and threw a plank over to the bank.

This formed a bridge. It permitted me to go aboard without risking the dangerous jump. And I stepped safely upon the boat, my harp slung over my shoulder and Dandiprat in my hand.

"Let's have the monkey!" Arthur cried.

I walked up to the child, and while he was petting and stroking Dandiprat, I could study him at my leisure.

A surprising thing! He was really strapped to a board, just as I had guessed him to be.

"Have you a master, my child?" the lady asked me.

"Yes, but I am alone for the time being."

"For long?"

"For two months."

"Two months! O my poor little chap! How does it come that you are left so long to yourself at your age?"

"It couldn't be helped, Madame!"

"I suppose your master makes you bring him a sum of money at the end of these two months?"

"No, Madame, he doesn't make me do anything. It's enough if I can earn a living for my animals and myself."

"And have you got along all right so far?"

I hesitated before answering. I had never seen a lady who commanded such respect as did this one who was questioning me. She spoke so kindly, her voice was so sweet, her look was so encouraging, that I decided to tell her the truth. Besides, why should I be silent?

I told her then how I had had to separate from Vitalis, who was condemned to prison for defending me. I told her how I had been unable to earn a cent since I had left Toulouse.

Arthur had been playing with the dogs while I was talking, but he had listened none the less and heard what I was saying.

"Why, how hungry you must be!" he cried out.

At these words, which they understood very well, the dogs set to barking and Dandiprat rubbed his stomach like mad.

"O Mama!" Arthur said.

The lady understood this appeal. She spoke a few words in a strange language to a woman whose head was visible through a half-opened door, and almost at once this woman brought out a little table with food on it.

"Sit down, my child," the lady said.

I did not wait to be urged. I took off my harp and sat down quickly at the table. The dogs ranged themselves around me, and Dandiprat took his place on my knee.

"Do your dogs eat bread?" Arthur asked.

"Do they! Just watch!" I gave them each a piece which they bolted ravenously.

"And how about the monkey?" Arthur inquired.

But there was no need of worrying about the monkey, for while I had been waiting upon the dogs Dandiprat had snatched a crust of meat pie and was in a fair way to strangle himself with it under the table.

In my turn I helped myself to a slice of the meat pie, and if I did not exactly choke over it the way Dandiprat did, I devoured it no less greedily than he.

"Poor child!" the lady said, as she filled my glass.

As for Arthur, he said nothing at all, but he looked at us with wide-open eyes. He was certainly astonished at our appetites, for one of us was just as ravenous as the other, even Sport, who you would think might by this time be somewhat gluttoned by the big piece of meat he had stolen.

"Where were you going to dine this evening if we had not met each other?" Arthur asked.

"I don't believe we should have had anything to eat."

"And where would you have got dinner tomorrow?"

"Perhaps tomorrow we shall have the luck to meet some one, just as we have today."

Arthur broke off his talk with me, to turn to his mother and hold a long conversation with her in the foreign language that I had already heard them use. He appeared to be asking her something that she was not inclined to grant. At least she was raising objections.

Then suddenly the boy turned his head toward me, although his body did not move with it.

"Would you like to stay with us?" he said.

I looked at him without replying, for his question was so unexpected.

"My son is asking you if you would care to remain with us."

"On this boat?"

"Yes, on this boat. My son is ill. The doctors have ordered him strapped to a board, just as you see him. I am taking him for a trip in this boat, so that he will find life less unpleasant. You will live with us. Your dogs and your monkey will give their performances with Arthur as their audience. And you, my child, can play the harp for us. Thus you will be doing us a real service, and we on our side shall perhaps be useful to you. You won't have to be finding a new audience every day, which for a child of your age is not always an easy thing to do."

On a boat! I had never before been on a boat, and that had been my dearest wish. I was now going to live on a boat — what happiness!

I took the lady's hand in mine and kissed it. She seemed to like this testimony of my gratitude. Kindly, tenderly almost, she brushed my forehead with her hand several times.

"Poor little youngster!" she said.

Since I had been asked to play my harp, it seemed to me I should not delay in answering this request. My readiness would in a certain way be evidence of my good will and my gratitude. I took up my instrument and, going to a place in the prow of the boat, I began to play.

At just this moment the lady put a little silver whistle to her lips and blew a sharp note upon it. I stopped my playing at once, uncertain as to why she was giving this signal. Did she mean that I was playing badly or that she wished me to be silent?

Arthur, whose sharp eyes missed nothing that went on around him, guessed the reason for my uneasiness.

"Mama blew for the horses to start on again," he said.

And so it turned out. The boat, which had been drawn away from the bank, was now beginning to slip along the calm waters of the canal, towed by horses. The little waves lapped gently against the keel. On either hand the trees sped past us, lighted by the slanting rays of the setting sun.

"Won't you play now?" asked Arthur.

He made a motion of his head to call his mother to his side. He took her hand in his and held it there all the time that I was playing the different pieces my master had taught me.

CHAPTER XII

MY FIRST FRIEND

Arthur's mother was an English lady, and her name was Mrs. Milligan. She was a widow, and I thought that Arthur was her only son. But I soon came to learn that she had an older boy, who had disappeared in a mysterious manner. They had never been able to discover any trace of him. Just at the time when this took place, Mr. Milligan lay at the point of death, and Mrs. Milligan, herself gravely ill, did not know anything that was going on around her. When she returned to consciousness, her husband had passed away and her son had vanished. A search for him had been carried on by Mr. James Milligan, her brother-in-law, who, because his brother had died without leaving an heir, fully expected to inherit the property.

Such was not to be the case, however, for seven months after the death of her husband Mrs. Milligan's second son, Arthur, was born.

Now this infant, so delicate and ailing, could not possibly live, the doctors said. It was expected to die from one moment to another. And as soon as this happened Mr. James Milligan would at last inherit the estate and the fortune of his older brother, for the laws of succession are not the same in every country, and in England in certain cases they permit an uncle to inherit instead of a mother.

The hopes of Mr. James Milligan were thus postponed by the birth of his nephew, but he did not believe them destroyed. He only had to possess his soul in patience. So he waited for the doctors' predictions to come to pass.

But they were not realized. Arthur remained frail, it is true, but he refused to die as it had been prophesied he would. The care given him by his mother kept him alive. This is a miracle which, God be praised, occurs frequently enough.

A treatment had been prescribed which consisted in keeping the invalid stretched out at full length and which did not permit him to set foot on the ground. His mother could not bear to have her child shut up in the four walls of a house, dying of boredom and deprived of sunlight and fresh air. And therefore, as Arthur was unable to walk, the house in which he dwelt had to do the walking for him. Mrs. Milligan had had built in Bordeaux the boat on which I had embarked — a floating cottage with bedroom, kitchen, parlor, and veranda. According to the weather, Arthur remained inside or out on the porch. His mother was by his side from morning to night, and without his having to make the slightest move the landscape passed before his eyes constantly.

The day of my arrival I made acquaintance only with the cabin which I was to occupy. Although it was quite small, this cabin, some six feet long and three feet broad, was the most charming room as well as the most astonishing one that a youngster's imagination could possibly dream of.

The furniture consisted solely of a bureau, but this

resembled the inexhaustible bottle case of the physician which contains so many different things. Instead of being solid, the upper shelf of this bureau was movable, and if you raised it you discovered underneath a complete bed with mattress, pillows, and coverings. Of course this couch was not very large, but it was big enough for one to sleep on most comfortably. Under this bed there was a drawer furnished with all necessary toilet articles. And below this was another drawer divided into several compartments in which one could stow linen and clothes. There were no tables or chairs, at least in the ordinary form, but against the partition by the head of the bed there was a plank, which when lowered formed a table. And at the foot of the couch was another board which constituted a seat.

A small porthole pierced the sheathing of the boat and could be closed by a bull's-eye pane. This served at once to light and air the cabin.

When I was undressed and stretched out in bed, I had a feeling of well-being quite new in my experience. It was the first time that sheets had felt soft against my skin instead of scratching it. In Mother Barberin's house I slept between hempen sheets that were hard and rough. When with Vitalis I often slept without sheets in the straw or on a haystack.

But, happy as I was in my comfortable bed, I arose at the break of day, for I was anxious to learn how my animals had got through the night.

I found my little company in the very place where I had installed them the night before, sleeping as soundly

as if the boat had been their home these many months. The dogs awoke as I approached and ran to me to get their morning petting. Dandiprat, although his eyes were half opened, was the only one that did not stir, and he started to snore like a trombone.

It required no great effort of the imagination to guess what his action meant. Dandiprat was a very touchy sort of person, was quick to take offense, and when once irritated he sulked a long time. This time he was angry because I had not taken him into the cabin with me, and he was showing his annoyance by pretending to be sound asleep.

I could not tell him the reasons which had compelled me, to my great regret, to leave him out on deck. And because I felt that I had at least in appearance done him wrong, I took him up in my arms to stroke him and let him see how sorry I was.

At first he persisted in his sulking, but after a little, so changeable was his temper, he began to think of something else and made signs to show me that if I would take him for a stroll on the land he might perhaps forgive me.

The sailor I had seen the evening before at the tiller had already risen and was busy cleaning the deck. He was willing to set the gangplank out on the ground for me, and thus I was able to walk down into the field with my troupe.

The time passed quickly. I was playing with the dogs and with Dandiprat, running, jumping ditches, climbing trees. By the time we got back, the horses were

hitched to the boat and tied to a poplar tree beside the towpath. A stroke of the whip and they were ready to depart.

I ran aboard quickly. A few minutes later the lashing that held the boat to the bank was cast off, the sailor took his place at the tiller, the tow-boy mounted his horse, the pulley through which the cable passed grated — we were under way.

What fun it was to ride in a boat! The horses trotted along the towpath; we slipped smoothly along on the surface of the water without the slightest jar; the two wooded banks glided quickly past us. There was not a sound to be heard except the swirl of the water against the keel, the gentle plashing merging with the tinkling of the bells the horses wore at their necks.

At times the water looked quite black, as if it covered immeasurable depths. In other places, on the contrary, it stretched out in transparent sheets which permitted a view of the shining pebbles and velvety herbs down beneath.

I was absorbed in my thoughts when I heard my name called from behind me. I turned around quickly. It was Arthur who was being carried on his plank. His mother was close to him.

“Did you have a good sleep?” he asked. “Better than you get out in the fields?”

I went up to him and said that I had, seeking for polite words with which to reply to his mother as much as to the child.

“And how about the dogs?” he said.

I called them, and Dandiprat as well. They came up barking out a greeting, Dandiprat making faces, as he did whenever he thought we were going to give a performance.

But there was no question of our playing a comedy that morning.

Mrs. Milligan had installed her son so that he was protected from the rays of the sun, and had settled down beside him.

"And now, please take away the dogs and the monkey," she said to me, "for we have work to do."

I did as I was asked and led my troupe off to the front of the boat. What sort of work could that poor sick child do? I wondered. I saw that his mother was making him repeat a lesson, the text of which she followed in an open book.

Stretched out on his plank, Arthur recited without making a movement. Or, to be more truthful, he tried to recite, for he was faltering greatly and could not say three words together. Sometimes he got it altogether wrong.

His mother reproved him gently, but at the same time firmly.

"You do not know your fable," she said.

"O Mama!" he said in a pitiful voice.

"You are making more mistakes today than you did yesterday."

"I tried to learn it."

"But you did not do so."

"I just couldn't."

"Why not?"

"I don't know — because I couldn't — I'm ill."

"Your head isn't ill. I shall never consent to your not learning anything and growing up in ignorance just because you are not strong."

Mrs. Milligan seemed very stern to me, and yet she spoke without anger and in a tender voice.

"Why do you make me so unhappy by not learning your lessons?"

"I can't, Mama, I assure you." And Arthur started to weep.

But Mrs. Milligan did not let herself be disturbed by his tears, although she seemed touched and really unhappy, just as she had said.

"I wanted to let you play this morning with Remi and his dogs," she continued, "but you can't play unless you repeat your fable to me without a single mistake."

Whereupon she handed the book to Arthur and told him that he could now learn the lesson all by himself. She went inside the boat.

Arthur at once set himself to reading the fable, and from where I was standing I could see his lips move.

It was evident that he was working as hard as he could. But this industry of his did not last long. Soon he raised his eyes from the page before him and his lips suddenly ceased altogether to move.

His eyes, which had begun to wander about, caught my fixed gaze. I made a sign with my hand to urge him to return to his lesson. He smiled at me sweetly, as if to thank me for reminding him, and he fixed his glance again

on his book. But almost immediately he raised his eyes again, and they roamed from one bank of the canal to the other. Unfortunately, just at that moment a kingfisher flew across the canal in front of the boat, swift as the flight of an arrow, leaving behind him a blue streak. Arthur raised his head to follow the bird's course. Then, when the vision had vanished, he looked at me.

"I simply can't do it," he said, "and yet I want to learn it."

I drew close to him.

"This fable isn't so very difficult after all," I told him.

"Oh, my, but it is too — awfully hard."

"It seems easy enough to me. I heard your mother reading it, and I believe I learned it then."

He smiled at me with a doubtful air.

"Do you want me to recite it to you?"

"Why should I? You couldn't do it."

"Yes, I could, too. Shall I try it? Here, you take the book!"

He took up the book, and I began to recite. He did not have to prompt me but three or four times.

"How on earth did you come to learn it?"

"I listened to your mother's reading of it, but I listened with all my soul and didn't keep looking around to see what was going on."

He blushed and turned away his eyes. Then, after a short moment of shame, he said, "I understand now how you memorized it, and I'll try to pay just as good attention as you did. But tell me how did you keep in mind all those words that got so hopelessly mixed up in me?"

I had not thought of that until this moment. However, I tried my best to explain to him what he wished to know.

"Well, what is the fable about?" I said. "About a sheep, isn't it? So I begin to think of sheep. Next, I wonder what they are doing: 'The sheep were safely in their fold.' I see them lying down and sleeping in their inclosure, for they are safe from harm. And when I have once seen them, I don't forget them."

"Fine," he said, "I can see them, too! 'The sheep are safely in their fold.' I see some white and some black ones, ewes and lambs. I can see the inclosure, too. It is made of wattles."

"Then you won't forget it."

"I should say not!"

"What is it that usually guards the sheep?"

"Dogs, of course."

"When they don't have to guard the sheep because their charges are safe, what do the dogs do?"

"They don't do anything."

"Then they can sleep. So we say: 'The dogs were dozing.'"

"That's what they're doing. That's easy to remember."

"Surely. And now, let's think of something else. Who watches over the sheep, along with the dogs?"

"A shepherd."

"If the animals are in safety, the shepherd has nothing to do. How do you suppose he puts in his time?"

"Playing the flute."

"Can you see him doing it?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"In the shade of a big elm tree."

"Is he alone there?"

"No, he is with other shepherds of the neighborhood."

"Well, then, if you see the sheep, the fold, the dogs, and the shepherds, do you mean to say you can't repeat the beginning of the fable without a single mistake?"

"I guess I can."

"Try it."

Arthur recited the first part of the fable without a single slip and then applied himself to learning the rest of it.

In less than a quarter of an hour he had it by heart and was just starting to recite it when his mother came up behind him unseen. Just at first she was angry to see us together, for she imagined we had been doing nothing but play. But before she could say a word in protest, Arthur cried out, "I know it! And it was Remi who taught it to me."

Mrs. Milligan looked at me in great surprise and was going to question me, when Arthur, without being urged, began to recite "The Wolf and the Young Sheep." He carried the whole thing through with an air of triumphant joy, without a bit of hesitation and without the slightest error.

While he was doing this I glanced at Mrs. Milligan. I saw her beautiful face light up with a smile, and then I was not sure, but I thought I saw the tears come into

her eyes. She bent her head over her son, kissed him tenderly, and put her arms about his neck.

"The words," said Arthur, "are silly and don't mean anything. But you can see the things the fable tells about. Remi made me see the shepherd fellow playing on his flute. When I raised my eyes from the book, I didn't think of what was about me, for I was looking at the shepherd's flute and hearing the melody he was playing. Shall I sing you the tune of it, Mama?" And he began to sing a sad little English song.

This time Mrs. Milligan cried in good earnest, for when she got up again I saw her tears on the cheeks of her child. Then she came over to me, took my hand, and pressed it so gently that I was very much moved.

"You are a good boy," she said to me.

If I have told this little incident at some length, it has been to make clear the change which from that very day took place in my position. The evening before they had taken me, a little animal trainer, on to the boat so that I and my comedians might amuse a sick child. But this hour of mine with Arthur had separated me from the dogs and the monkey, and made of me a comrade, almost a friend.

When I now look back on the days passed on this boat with Mrs. Milligan and Arthur, I realize that they were the fairest ones of my childhood. The trip was to me a constant source of wonder. There was never a moment of worry, not an hour of weariness. My whole day from morning to night was filled with happy things.

If the countryside was interesting, we would move

slowly, at the most a few leagues a day. But if, on the other hand, it was monotonous, we could increase our speed at will.

When the sun was setting, we would stop wherever the failing light overtook us, and there we would stay until the light of the next day invited to departure.

If the evening air was damp, we would shut ourselves up in the parlor. Then, after we had lighted a good fire to drive away the humidity or the chill which was not good for a sick boy, the lamps would be brought in. Arthur would be placed before the table, I would sit down beside him, and Mrs. Milligan would show us picture books or photographic views.

But if the evening was fair, then I had a more active rôle to play. At such a time I would take my harp and, climbing down on the ground, would go off a little way. I would place myself behind a tree that I might be hidden in its shadows, and then I would sing all the songs and play all the melodies that I knew. It was a great joy to Arthur thus to hear music in the stillness of the night without being able to see the source from which it came. Often he would cry, "Do it over again!" and I would begin anew to play the air that I had just finished.

That was a gentle and a happy life for a child who, like myself, had left Mother Barberin's fireside to tramp the highroads with Signor Vitalis.

What a difference there was between the solitary dish of salted potatoes set before me by my poor foster mother and the delicious fruit tarts, the jellies, the creams, and the pastry that Mrs. Milligan's cook prepared!

What a contrast between the long tramps in the mud, in the rain, under the scorching sun at the heels of my master, and this lazy riding on the pleasure barge!

How often, as I looked at Arthur stretched out upon his plank, pale and suffering though he was, did I not envy him — I who was so filled with the sense of health and strength!

It was not the good living that surrounded him which I envied, any more than it was his books, his expensive toys. Nor yet was it his boat. It was the love that his mother showered upon him.

How happy he must be to be thus loved, to be thus kissed ten and twenty times a day, and to be able himself to return such caresses whenever he would, to let his heart go out to this beautiful lady, his mother, whose outstretched hand I scarcely dared to touch.

And then I said to myself sadly that I should never have a mother who would kiss me and whom I should kiss. Some day, perhaps, I should see Mother Barberin again, and that would be a great joy to me, but from now on I should never again be able to call her "Mother" as I used to do, because in good truth she was not my mother after all.

Alone! I should always be alone.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FOUNDLING

My time of vacation had passed all too quickly during this voyage, and the moment was now near at hand when my master's term in prison was drawing to a close.

As we drew ever farther and farther away from Toulouse, this thought kept tormenting me with increasing force. And so one day I decided to ask Mrs. Milligan how long she thought it would take me to get to that city, for I wished to be found waiting outside the prison door at just the instant my master walked forth a free man.

When he heard me talking of my departure, Arthur began to howl at the top of his lungs.

"I don't want Remi to go away!" he cried.

I explained to him that I did not feel free, that I belonged to my master to whom my parents had farmed me out. I said that I must return to him the very second he had need of my services.

I spoke thus of my parents without telling that they were really not my father and mother, for then it would have been necessary to admit that I was nothing but a foundling.

"Mama, we'll just have to keep Remi with us," Arthur persisted.

"I should be very happy to have Remi stay with us," Mrs. Milligan replied, "you and he have become such friends, and I am no end fond of him myself. But there

are two conditions to our keeping him. The first is that Remi wishes to stay with us —”

“Oh, Remi wants to, fast enough!” Arthur broke in. “You don’t want to go back to Toulouse, do you?”

“The second condition is that his master consents to give up his rights to him,” continued Mrs. Milligan.

“Remi is the one to decide — he comes first,” insisted Arthur.

Vitalis had been a good master to me, there was no denying that. And I was grateful to him for his lessons and for all his care of me. But there was, of course, no comparison between the life that I had led with him and the one which Mrs. Milligan offered me. Besides all this, I had to confess, not without a feeling of shame, that there was no comparison between the affection I felt for Vitalis and the fondness with which Mrs. Milligan and Arthur inspired me. I kept repeating to myself that it was naughty of me to prefer these strangers to my master, and yet there it was! I loved my new-found friends very tenderly.

“Before giving an answer,” Mrs. Milligan continued, “Remi must understand that it is not only a life of ease and pleasure which I am offering him, but just another life of work. He will have to pore over his books, work hard, pursue the same studies as Arthur. And he must weigh all this, and compare it with the freedom he has been enjoying in tramping the roads.”

“Oh, there’s no comparison at all, Madame,” I said.

“There, you see, Mama?” Arthur cried. “Remi wants to stay with us.”

"Then in that case," went on Mrs. Milligan, "there's nothing left to do but to obtain his master's consent. I'll write to him to look us up at the town of Cette, since we shall be unable to return to Toulouse. I'll send him money for the railroad tickets and things, at the same time telling him that Arthur's sickness prevents our taking the train to where he is. If he accepts my proposal, then there's nothing else to do but to come to an agreement with your parents, Remi. For of course they must give their consent."

Give their consent!

If Mrs. Milligan consults my parents, then the cat will be out of the bag! For surely they will tell her just what I wish to keep secret — that I am a foundling.

Then neither Arthur nor yet Mrs. Milligan will want to have me about them — nobody's boy.

I was terribly cast down, and I suppose I looked the part.

Mrs. Milligan gazed at me in surprise and tried to get me to talk, but I did not dare reply to her questions. After a moment or two she no longer urged me, for she thought without doubt that the near arrival of my master was a source of worry to me.

Luckily, all this took place in the evening, just a little while before it was time to go to bed. So I was able to escape the curious glances of Arthur and to go to my cabin with all my fears and worries.

Then followed my first bad night on board the "Swan." Oh, it was terribly long and bad and feverish! What could I do or say? I could come to no decision.

Perhaps Vitalis would not be willing to give me up. In that case, I should go away with him again, and they would never stumble upon the truth. I was in such a state of terror at the possibility of their discovering I was a foundling that I began to hope most ardently that Vitalis would not accept the proposal of Mrs. Milligan and that they could come to no arrangements in the matter.

Three days after having written to my master, Mrs. Milligan received a reply. In a short note Vitalis said that he would have the honor of accepting her invitation, and that he would arrive at Cette the following Saturday on the two o'clock train.

I asked Mrs. Milligan's permission to go to the depot and, taking the dogs and Dandiprat along with me, I awaited the coming of our master. The dogs were restless as if they were in doubt about something. Dandiprat was entirely calm, but I was awfully excited. What contradictory struggles were going on in my poor soul!

I had taken my place in a corner of the station yard, holding my three dogs on a leash, and with Dandiprat under my waistcoat I waited without casting a glance at what was going on around me.

It was the dogs who announced to me the arrival of the train and that they had become aware of our master. Suddenly I felt myself being dragged forward and, as I was off my guard, the dogs broke away from me. They scurried off barking joyously, and a few seconds later I saw them dancing around Vitalis, who had just come upon the scene, dressed in his usual costume.

Quicker, although less supple than his comrades,

Cappy sprang straight into his master's arms, while Sport and Dulcie fastened themselves to his legs.

I stepped forward in my turn. Vitalis set Cappy down and folded me in his arms. For the first time in his life he kissed me, and he kept saying over and over again, "God bless you, my poor, dear boy!"

My master had never treated me harshly, but on the other hand he had never been very demonstrative, and I was not used to these evidences of affection. They touched me deeply and made the tears come to my eyes, for I was in the mood when the heart shuts and opens quickly.

I took a good look at him and found that he had grown old in prison. His shoulders stooped, his face had grown pale, and his lips were colorless.

"Well, well! You find me changed, my boy, eh?" he said. "Prison is a bad place to dwell in, and being bored is the worst kind of sickness. But things are going to mend now."

And then he changed the subject and asked, "How did you come to know this lady who wrote me the letter?"

I told him then how I had happened upon the "Swan," and how from that moment I had been living on it with Mrs. Milligan and Arthur. I gave him an account of all that we had seen and done. I made my story as long as possible, for I was afraid it would end too soon and then I should have to mention the subject that frightened me. For now I could never bear to tell my master that I wished he would leave me in the care of Mrs. Milligan and Arthur.

But it was not necessary for me to make this confession to him, for before my recital was over with we had arrived at the hotel where Mrs. Milligan was staying. Besides, Vitalis said nothing about her letter to him or about the contents of it.

"Is this lady waiting to see me?" he asked as we entered the hotel.

"Yes, and I am to take you right up to her apartment."

"You don't need to do that. Just give me the number of her rooms and wait down here for me with the dogs and Dandiprat."

Why did he not wish me to be present at his interview with Mrs. Milligan? I kept asking myself this question and studying it from every angle. And I still had discovered no answer for it by the time that I saw him coming back.

"Run and say good-by to this lady," he said. "I'll wait for you here. We are going to leave in ten minutes."

I was very slow to move. I was completely taken aback by the direction the decision had taken.

"Look here!" he said after a few moments of waiting. "Didn't you understand what I said? Don't stand there like a stone image. Trot right along, as I tell you to!"

It was not his habit to speak harshly to me. Since I had first known him he had never talked to me like that.

Mechanically I got up to obey him, but I still did not understand what he wanted.

But, after I had taken a few steps on my way upstairs to Mrs. Milligan's apartment, I called back to him, "Then you went and told her —"

"I informed her that you were useful to me and that I was useful to you; for this reason, that I was not disposed to surrender the rights I had to you. Run along, and come back soon."

His rough command gave me a little courage, for I was so completely under the influence of the notion that I was a foundling, I thought I had to clear out at ten minutes' warning because my master had told what he knew about the facts of my birth.

On entering Mrs. Milligan's suite of rooms, I found Arthur in tears and his mother bending over him to console him.

"You're not going to leave me, are you, Remi?" Arthur cried.

Mrs. Milligan answered him for me, explaining that I had to obey.

"I asked your master if I might keep you with us," she said to me, in a voice that brought the tears to my eyes, "but he would not consent to this, and nothing could move him."

"He is a wicked man!" Arthur declared.

"No, he is not a bad man at all," Mrs. Milligan continued. "He needs you and, what is more, I believe he is really fond of you. Besides, his words are those of an honorable man and of one who has seen better days. Here is the reason he gave to explain his refusal to do what I asked:

"I love this child, and he loves me. The rough training of the life which he is getting with me will prove more useful to him than the petting and spoiling you

would give him, no matter how hard you tried not to. It is true he would learn things with you, but you would educate his mind, you would not form his character. He could never be your son, but he will be mine. And that is better than to be the plaything of your sickly child, sweet and gentle as the little invalid seems to be. Besides, I am going to teach the boy myself.' ”

“I don't care what you say — he isn't Remi's father!” Arthur pouted.

“That is true, but he is his master. And Remi belongs to him, because his parents hired him out for money. For the moment at least he must obey his master.”

“But I don't want Remi to go.”

“He will have to do what he is told, just the same. But I hope things will not be that way long. We will write to his parents, and have an understanding with them.”

“Oh, no!” I cried.

“But why not?”

“Please don't, I beg of you.”

“But there's nothing else to do, my child.”

“But you won't do that, will you?”

It is almost certain that if Mrs. Milligan had not mentioned my parents, I should have taken much longer to say good-by than the ten minutes my master had given me.

“Your home is in Chavanon, isn't it?” Mrs. Milligan continued.

Without answering her, I went up to Arthur. I put my arms around him and hugged him so as to show all



"Poor child," Mrs. Milligan murmured

the love I had for him. Then I tore myself away from his clasp and gave my hand to Mrs. Milligan.

"Poor child!" she murmured, as she bent down and kissed me on the forehead.

I turned away quickly and ran to the door.

"I'll always love you, Arthur," I said, with a voice choked by sobs. "And I shall never forget you, Madame!"

"Remi, come back!" Arthur called.

But I did not hear more. I had gone, closing the door behind me. A moment later I was with my master.

"Let's go!" he said to me.

CHAPTER XIV

SNOW AND WOLVES

Once more I had to follow in the footsteps of my master, the strap of my harp slung over my aching shoulder, traveling along the highroads in rain as well as sunshine, through dust as well as mud.

I had to act the fool in public squares and laugh or weep, in order to amuse the "honorable audience."

The change was a sudden one, for it does not take a boy long to accustom himself to good living and happiness. When I had been with Mrs. Milligan I often thought of Vitalis, and now that I was the steady comrade of Vitalis I could think of nobody but her.

More than once, during our long tramps, I would drop behind to let my mind dwell without restraint on Arthur, his mother, and the "Swan." At such times I would relive the past most vividly.

What fun it had all been! And, ah, at night, when I would be lying in some dirty village inn, how coarse and rough the bed sheets would seem to me, when I compared them with those in my neat little cabin on the barge!

I should doubtless never again play with Arthur, never again listen to the caressing voice of Mrs. Milligan.

But, happily, I had one consolation in this time of real and lasting sorrow. My master treated me much more kindly and gently than in the days gone by.

There had come a great change in his character, or at least in his attitude toward me. This knowledge gave me courage and made me feel that I was no longer alone in the world. Somehow I knew that Vitalis was more to me now than just a master.

A number of times, if I had dared to, I would have thrown my arms around him, I wanted so much to find utterance for the feeling of affection that he inspired in me. But he was not the sort of man with whom one could be familiar.

In the olden times it had been fear which made me keep my distance from him, but now it was a vague feeling which bordered on respect that withheld me.

When I had first left my native village, Vitalis had been to me only a man like any other, so incapable was I at that time of making distinctions. But my stay with Mrs. Milligan had opened my eyes and my mind. And it seemed to me, now that I studied my master with greater attention, that I found many points of resemblance between his manners and behavior and those of Mrs. Milligan.

This seemed very odd to me, and I would say to myself it could not be true, for Vitalis was only a poor showman with performing animals, while Mrs. Milligan was a lady born and bred.

. . . . We remained several weeks in Lyons, and every moment I had to myself I spent on the docks which bordered the rivers Rhone and Saône. I came to know the different bridges that spanned their waters as thoroughly as if I had lived in Lyons all my life. But, no

matter how much I might search and look, I could find not the slightest trace of the "Swan."

The day came at last when we had to leave the great city and turn our steps to Dijon. From that moment all hope of ever seeing Mrs. Milligan and Arthur again died within me. For, while we had been in Lyons, I had pored over all the maps of France that I had been able to find on the booksellers' shelves, and so I had learned that the only route the "Swan" could take to reach the Loire branched off from the Saône at Chalon. Now we had arrived at Chalon and gone on again, without ever a sight of the "Swan." So I had to bid a fond farewell to my dream of a second meeting with those I had come to love.

And, as if to increase my despair, which was deep enough already, the weather grew terrible. The season of the year was far advanced, winter was approaching, and the forced marches in the rain, through the mud, became more and more painful. In the evening, when we would arrive at a miserable tavern or stable, worn out with fatigue and soaked to the skin, splashed to the eyes with mud, I did not go to bed with any happy notions in my head.

My master's aim was to reach Paris by the shortest road possible, for in no other town than the capital of France could we hope to give paying performances in the winter. Whether it was the lean state of his purse or some other reason that forbade Vitalis' traveling by train, I do not know. Anyhow, it was on foot that we covered the long distance which separates Dijon from Paris.

Whenever the weather permitted it, we would give a

short performance in the towns and villages through which we passed. Then, after we had collected our small receipts, we would set out on our march again. As far as Chatillon we got along pretty well, even though we did suffer a good bit from the cold and wet. But the moment we turned our backs on this town, the rain ceased and the wind swung into the north.

Just at first we did not complain, although it is not exactly pleasant to have the north wind full in your face, for, all things considered, this gale, cutting though it was, was preferable to the wet weather in which we had been almost perishing for weeks. But, unfortunately, the wind did not remain dry; the sky filled with great black clouds, the sun disappeared from sight entirely, and every sign announced that we should soon have a snowstorm.

We could reach a large village easily enough before the storm set in, but my master's intention was to get to Troyes the first moment possible, because Troyes is a large town in which we could give several performances in case the bad weather obliged us to remain there.

"Go to bed at once," he ordered me when we reached an inn that evening, "for we've got to make an early start tomorrow. I am afraid of getting held up by a snowstorm."

But he himself could not turn in so soon, for he had to stay by a corner of the fireplace in the kitchen to rub warmth into the veins of Dandiprat who had been suffering a good deal from cold all day and who had never stopped whining for a minute, although we had taken great pains to keep him wrapped up in his blankets.

Next morning I arose in the darkness, as I had been told to. It was not yet dawn. The sky was black and close to the earth, with never a star in it. It seemed as if a great dark coverlet was being lowered upon us, to blot us out. The moment we opened the door, a roaring draft of air rushed down the chimney and revived the embers which the night before had been buried beneath the ashes.

"If I were you, I shouldn't think of starting," said the innkeeper to my master. "We're in for a heavy snow."

"I've no time to waste," replied Vitalis, "and I hope to get to Troyes before the storm breaks."

"You can't do twenty miles in an hour!"

Nevertheless, we set out.

In order to transmit to him a little of his own bodily heat, Vitalis held Dandiprat tightly beneath his waistcoat. The dogs, glad of the dry weather, ran on ahead of us. My master had bought me in Dijon a sheepskin coat lined with its own wool. I wrapped myself up in this, and the gale that blew in our faces glued it tightly to my body.

It was not pleasant to open one's mouth, so we hurried along without saying a word, quite as much to gain time as to keep ourselves warm.

Although the hour of daybreak was at hand, there were no rays of light in the sky. After a long while a strip of pale white divided the darkness on the eastern horizon, but the sun did not appear. It was not exactly night, but it would be a great exaggeration to say that it was day.

In the fields around us, however, objects were becoming somewhat more distinct. The uncertain light showed us bleak trees stripped of their leaves, and here and there dried underbrush and shrubbery that gave forth a crisp, crackling sound under the force of the gusts of wind.

Nobody on the road, no one in the fields — not the creak of a cart wheel or the crack of a teamster's whip. The sole living things abroad, except for ourselves, were the birds. And these one scarcely saw but only heard, for they were hidden in the shelter of their nests.

All at once a white spot appeared in the sky toward the north. It grew quickly bigger as it advanced upon us, and at that moment we heard a strange murmur of discordant cries — wild geese flying above our heads, so swiftly that they were far in the distance before we noticed little flakes of down floating in the air, their whiteness standing out clearly against the black sky.

With all our tramping in the teeth of the wind we seemed to have made little headway. It now began to look as if it would be impossible to get to Troyes before the storm. This thought, however, did not discourage me, for I reminded myself that the falling snow would check the force of the north wind and lessen the cold — all of which shows how little I knew about a real winter storm. Nor did it take me long to learn my lesson, and in a fashion that I shall never forget.

The clouds sweeping from the northwest were gathering over us, and a sort of white light illumined the sky in that direction. Their innermost parts suddenly gaped, and the snow was upon us.

It was no longer as if butterflies were hovering before our eyes; a heavy downpour of snow fairly enveloped us.

"It is decreed that we shall not arrive at Troyes," muttered Vitalis. "We shall have to take shelter in the first house we come across."

This statement of his sounded very good to my ears, but where were we to find such a hospitable dwelling? Before the mantle of snow had wrapped us around in its white dimness, I had examined the landscape as far as my eyes could reach, but I had seen no habitation nor any sign of a village. On the contrary, we had been just on the point of entering a forest whose deep shadows stretched off into the distance before us and over the hills on both sides of us.

The storm continued, and its violence increased.

We tramped doggedly and painfully forward, blinded, wet, and frozen. Nor did we succeed in finding shelter, even after we had reached the heart of the woods, for the road through it was open and exposed to the full force of the gale.

From time to time I noticed my master was looking toward the left, as if he was in search of something. What could he be hoping to find in that direction?

As for me, I kept my gaze straight ahead of me on the road, sweeping its farthest horizon, seeking to discover whether this forest would not end some time and disclose to us the sight of a house.

The situation was not a very jolly one, for I had never watched the falling snow even when I was behind the window pane of a well-warmed room without having

a feeling of vague sorrow inside me. And at just this moment, I must say, a warm room seemed far off indeed.

Our feet were beginning to sink deeper and deeper into the soft bed of snow and the weight of it on our heads was growing heavier, when, all of a sudden, I saw Vitalis pointing to the left as if to attract my attention that way. I stared as hard as I could and seemed to make out indistinctly in the clearing of the wood a small hut of boughs covered with snow.

The next thing, of course, was to find the path which led to this hut, and this was a hard thing to do, for the snow was by this time thick enough to obliterate all traces of a regular trail or roadway. But we finally managed to cross an intervening ditch and without too much delay get inside the shelter. Once there, we found it as good as any house would have been.

The dogs reached the hut before we did and rolled over and over in the dry dust of the dirt floor, barking most happily. Our satisfaction was no less than theirs, only we did not show it by rolling in the dusty earth. It would not have been a bad way to dry ourselves, at that!

"I felt sure, when I saw this freshly felled wood, that there would be a woodcutter's cabin somewhere hereabouts," said Vitalis. "Now let it snow all it wants to!"

"Yes, let it fall," I chimed in with a defiant air.

And I walked to the doorway of the hut, which was the sole opening in it, to shake out my coat and hat, so as not to bring any dampness inside our hut.

Our lodging was quite simple both in its construction and in its furnishings. The latter consisted of a bank

of earth and some stones for seats. But the greatest blessing of all, considering the state we were in, was the five or six bricks which were placed on edge in the corner and formed the fireplace.

In a house made like this one it was not at all hard to find wood for a fire. All you had to do was to remove it from the walls and the roof, drawing out a few bunches of fagots and brushwood here and there, being careful not to impair the solidity of your dwelling.

This was quickly done, and before long a clear flame was gleaming and crackling joyously on our hearth. It is true that it did not burn without smoking, and as the smoke could not pass out of a chimney it spread throughout the hut, but what did this matter? It was the fire, the heat, that we were after.

While I was down on my hands and knees blowing on the fire, the dogs were sitting up on their haunches around the hearth, with their necks thrust gravely upward, exposing their half-frozen bodies to the warmth radiated by the fire.

Dandiprat soon pulled aside his master's coat and, prudently thrusting the tip of his nose out of his hiding place, looked about him to see where he was. Reassured by what he saw, he sprang quickly to the ground, and, choosing the best place before the fire, he held up to it his two quivering little paws.

We were now assured that we should not die of cold, but the question of food was still unsolved. Nowhere in this cabin was there a bread bin or a stove with singing kettles.

But luckily our master was a man of caution and experience. That morning before I got up he had secured his provisions for the trip — a loaf of bread and a small slab of cheese. This was certainly not the moment for any of us to look askance at the nature of our repast. Therefore, when we saw the loaf appear, we greeted the sight of this food with vast satisfaction.

“You will have to be content with just part of our provisions,” said Vitalis, as he saw me look at him questioningly, “for I am not sure whether between here and Troyes we shall find either shelter or food. Nor am I sure enough of our whereabouts in this wood, nor do I know just what forest it is. We may be many miles from another habitation. So we must save something for our dinner.”

I understood these reasons easily enough, particularly as I remembered what had happened on our departure from Toulouse after the imprisonment of Vitalis. But the dogs were not so quick to comprehend, and when they saw the loaf disappear again into the sack before they had fairly begun to eat, they stretched out their paws imploringly to their master, scratched his knees, and indulged in an expressive pantomime to make him open the sack at which their begging glances were directed.

Prayers and caresses were of no avail. The bag remained shut. There was nothing left for the dogs and me to do but sleep.

I have no idea how long I slumbered, but when I awoke the snow had stopped falling. I looked out through the doorway. The pile of snow which had drifted before

our hut had increased. If we resumed our journey now, it would be higher than our knees.

What hour of the day was it? I could not find out by asking my master, for during these last months our receipts had not been large enough to replace the money which his imprisonment and his trial had cost him. And so when in Dijon he had bought me my sheepskin coat and some other necessities for me and himself, he had been forced to sell his watch to pay for them. From that time on, daylight had had to tell me somehow or other what time it was.

But now there was nothing outside to give me the needed information. Everywhere about us an absolute stillness reigned — no night had ever been more silent than this day. All the world seemed stiff and rigid. It was as if the snow had arrested all movement, had petrified the whole landscape.

As I stood in the open doorway, marveling at the quiet spectacle spread out before me, I heard my name called by my master.

“Do you feel like setting forth again?” he asked.

“I don’t know — I don’t believe I do. But I am ready to do anything you suggest.”

“Well, my notion is that we had better stay where we are, for here we have a shelter and a fire, at least.”

It occurred to me that we had no bread to eat, but I kept this thought to myself.

“It looks as if it were going to snow again soon,” continued Vitalis, “and we ought not to expose ourselves until we know how far we are from dwellings.”

If it had not been for the shortage of food, this arrangement would have been a perfectly proper one. Well, we should have to take up the slack in our belts and go with empty stomachs, that's all there was about it.

When it came time for dinner, Vitalis divided what remained of the loaf into six pieces. Alas, there was little enough left! We made the portions as small as possible, to prolong the repast as long as we could, but how quickly it vanished!

After our poor meal, so meager and so short, was ended, I thought the dogs would repeat their morning's performance and beg for more, for they showed every sign of being ravenously hungry. But they did no such thing, and once more I saw how bright their minds were. When Vitalis had put his knife back into his breeches pocket, the invariable sign that our banquet was ended, Cappy got up and nodded to his two comrades. Then he went over and sniffed at the bag in which the food was usually kept. At the same moment he delicately placed his paw on the sack to feel of it. This double examination convinced him that there was nothing else in the way of food. Then he returned to his place by the hearth and after a second nod of his head toward Dulcie and Sport he stretched out full-length, with a sigh of resignation which seemed to say, "There's not another crumb — there's no use asking for it." This was expressed as plainly as if he had spoken.

His comrades understood his meaning. Like him, they stretched out on the ground before the fire, each sighing in his turn. But there was nothing resigned

about Sport's sigh, for he not only was a heavy feeder but liked good things to eat as well, which made his sacrifice much more tragic than that of the others.

The snow had begun to fall again. It was now drifting down with untiring persistence. Hour by hour one could see the mound which it formed on the ground rise higher on the stems of the shrubs until nothing but the upper tufts of foliage appeared above the white tide, and these threatened soon to be swallowed up by it.

When twilight faded into darkness the fall of snow was still continuing, great flakes drifting down upon the white earth from the black clouds above.

Since we had to spend the night there, it was best to go to sleep at once. I imitated the example of the dogs. First I rolled my sheepskin about me — it had been drying before the fire all day. Then I stretched out in front of the embers, with a flat stone as a pillow beneath my head.

"Go ahead and sleep," Vitalis said to me. "I'll wake you when it comes my turn. For, even though we have nothing to fear in this hut from either beasts or men, one of us must hold watch in order to keep the fire going. We must take precautions against the cold, which is likely to become bitter the moment the snowfall stops."

I did not wait for a second invitation, but fell asleep without delay. When my master woke me, the night was already far advanced, or at least I imagined it was. The snow had ceased to fall, the fire was burning brightly.

"It's your turn to watch now," Vitalis said. "You will only have to put wood on the fire from time to time. You see I have collected a goodly store of it."

And, sure enough, a pile of fagots had been heaped up within easy reach. My master, who slept much more lightly than I, did not want me to wake him every time I needed a new piece of firewood by going over to take it down from the wall. So he had gathered this heap for me, from which kindling could be removed without noise.

That had been, I suppose, a wise precaution. But, unfortunately, it did not have the result that Vitalis expected.

Seeing me awake and ready for my sentry duty, he had lain down with Dandiprat cuddled up close to him under a coverlet. And soon his deep and regular breathing told me that he had fallen asleep. Then I rose quietly and stole over to the opening to see what was happening outside.

The cold had increased and it was freezing hard out of doors, for the wind that came into the cabin was icy. In the mournful stillness of the night sharp crackings could be heard frequently, which showed that the surface of the snow was turning to ice.

We had indeed been fortunate to stumble across this shelter. What would have become of us out in the open forest, what with the snow and the fearful cold?

Quietly as I had stirred about, I had roused the dogs from their slumbers, and Sport had got up to walk to the door with me. Because he looked upon the splendors of this snowy night with different eyes from mine, he was soon bored and wished to wander out.

I at once ordered him back. What a crazy notion,

to wish to go out into the cold! The silly animal obeyed me, to be sure, but he kept his eyes obstinately fixed on the doorway, as if he had by no means abandoned his idea.

I remained in my place some minutes more, looking at the snow, for, although the beautiful spectacle filled my heart with a vague sadness, I found a sort of pleasure in studying it. I felt like shedding tears, and yet, although it would have been easy for me to close my eyes to the scene and go back to my couch by the fire, I did not do so.

After a long time I returned to the fire and placed three or four pieces of wood crosswise upon it. Then I thought I could sit down on the stone that had served me as a pillow, without running any risk.

My master was sleeping peacefully. The dogs and Dandiprat were also in the Land of Dreams. The flames leaped from the fire and mounted in spirals up to the roof, throwing off crackling sparks which were the only noises that broke the dead silence.

For I do not know how long, I amused myself by watching these snapping sparks of light. And then, without my being aware of it, weariness gradually began to wrap me round.

If I had had to worry about my stock of wood, I should have been kept awake getting up and walking about the hut in search of fuel. But sitting still, with no other movement to make than to stretch out my hand for wood to feed the flame, I began to yield to the tempting drowsiness that stole upon me and, full of the belief that I was keeping wide awake, I fell asleep.

Suddenly I found myself on my feet; the dogs were barking furiously.

It was still night. Apparently I had slept a long time, for the fire was out, or at least it was so dim that the flames no longer lighted up the cabin.

The barking continued. It was the voice of Cappy. But, strange to relate, neither Sport nor Dulcie replied to their comrade.

"Well, what on earth is the matter?" cried Vitalis, waking up.

"Oh, I don't know!"

"You've been asleep, and the fire has gone out."

Cappy had darted to the opening, but refused to go outside. He stood in the doorway barking.

I asked myself the question which my master had put to me: What had happened?

Two or three mournful howls echoed the baying of Cappy; in them I recognized the voice of Dulcie. These howls came from the rear of our cabin, a short distance away.

I made ready to leave the hut. My master held me back by placing his hand on my shoulder.

"First put some wood on the fire," he ordered.

And while I was obeying his command, he took a partly charred stick from the fire and blew upon it until only the tip was aflame. Then, instead of throwing it back into the embers when the point was at red heat, he kept it in his hand as a torch.

"Let's go see what is up," he said. "You walk behind me. Cappy, you go on ahead."

Just as we were starting out, a blood-curdling howl broke the silence, and Cappy started back shivering with fright.

"That's wolves! Where can Sport and Dulcie be?"

To that question there was no answer. Doubtless the dogs had strayed away while I was sleeping. Thus Sport had carried out the desire he had shown, but which I had forbidden him, and Dulcie must have gone along for company.

Had the wolves carried them off? It seemed as though the tone of my master's voice had betrayed this fear.

"Take a torch," he told me, "and we'll go to their aid."

I had heard awful things told about wolves in my village, and yet I could not hold back. I armed myself with a blazing stick and followed my master's lead. But when we had got out in the clearing there were no dogs to be seen high or low, nor wolves either. The only trace of them was the marks of their paws in the snow.

We followed these footprints. For a few yards they led around the hut, and then a short distance farther on there was a trampled spot in the snow that looked as if animals had been rolling around in it.

"Sic 'em, Cappy!" my master hissed, and then he began to whistle for Sport and Dulcie.

But there was no answering bark. Not a sound broke the mournful silence of the woods, and Cappy, instead of doing as he was told, kept close to our legs and gave every sign of restlessness and fear — he who was usually so obedient and so brave!

The reflected light from the snow was not sufficient for us to penetrate the gloom and follow the traces. A little way off, our dazzled eyes were powerless to distinguish objects in the confusing darkness.

Once again Vitalis whistled shrilly and called the dogs in a loud voice. We listened. The deep silence continued unbroken. My poor heart misgave me.

"Alas, poor Sport! Poor Dulcie!"

Vitalis confirmed my worst fears. "The wolves have dragged them away," he said. "Why did you let them stray from the hut?"

Ah, yes! Why had I failed in my duty? There was nothing to say.

"We'll have to go search for them," I said.

I stepped ahead of him, but he halted me with his hand.

"And where are you going to look?" he asked.

"I don't know. Everywhere."

"What signs are there to guide our steps through such gloom and in snow like this?"

He had spoken but the truth; it was an impossible undertaking. The snow reached halfway up our legs, and our poor torches would serve only to make the darkness blacker.

It was a terrible thing to abandon the two poor dogs thus — our companions and our friends — terrible especially for me, for I felt myself responsible for their fault. If I had not slept, they would have stuck to the cabin.

My master turned back toward the hut. I trudged along behind him, turning to listen at every second step.

But I saw nothing but snow, and I heard nothing except the crackling of it.

Once we were inside the shelter, another surprise awaited us. In our absence the branches I had thrown upon the embers had caught fire and were now flaming, throwing their light into the farthest corners of the hut.

But nowhere was Dandiprat to be seen. His coverlet was spread out before the fire, but it was lying flat and there was no monkey beneath it. Vitalis and I took turns calling. He did not appear. What could have become of him?

My master told me that when he awoke he had felt the monkey close by his side. So it must have been while we were away from the hut that he had disappeared. Could he have been trying to follow us?

We took a bundle of flaming boughs and went out again, bending forward and holding the branches close down to the snow, seeking to find some trace of Dandiprat. But we could not come across his track.

Then he could not have left the cabin, after all. We went back to the shelter to see if he was not perhaps cowering behind a bunch of firewood.

We kept up the search a long time, we looked everywhere, into each nook and cranny at least ten times. I climbed up on the shoulders of Vitalis to explore the branches that formed our roof, but all to no avail. From time to time we would stop to call him. But no response came.

Vitalis grew very angry, although he could see that I was in the depths of despair. Poor Dandiprat! I even

began to think the wolves had got him, too, and asked my master what he thought about it.

"No," he answered, "the wolves would never have dared enter the lighted cabin. I believe they sprang upon Sport and Dulcie the moment they got away, but they did not come in here. What is more likely is that Dandiprat got frightened and hid himself somewhere about while we were roaming around outside. I am anxious only because I fear he will catch his death of cold before we reach him."

"All we can do, then, is keep on looking."

So we began all over again from the beginning. But our success was no greater than in our earlier attempts.

"We'll simply have to wait for daybreak," Vitalis said.

"How long will that be?"

"Two or three hours from now, I imagine." And he sat down before the fire and held his head in his hands.

I did not dare disturb him. I remained close to him without moving a muscle, except when I added a fagot to the flame. From time to time he got up to peer out of the opening. Then he would glance up at the sky and bend forward to listen before he came back to his place. It seemed as if I should have been happier to have him scold me than to see him sitting so cast down and dejected.

The three hours he had prophesied passed by with unbelievable slowness. I began to think this night would never end.

However, the stars finally began to grow pale and the sky became lighter. It was morning and would soon be day. But as the light grew stronger the cold was more

intense. The wind that blew into the hut froze us to the very marrow.

If we should find Dandiprat now, would he still be alive? But what reasonable hope did we have of finding him, anyway? Who knew that the new day would not bring back the snow? And how should we search for the monkey if that were the case?

Luckily, the snow did not return. Instead of hiding anew behind clouds, as on the preceding day, the sky filled with a rosy light that foretold fine weather.

As soon as we could distinguish the true forms of bushes and trees in the cold light, we set forth on our hunt. Vitalis armed himself with a stout stick, and so did I.

Cappy no longer appeared to be under the influence of fright such as had weighed upon him the night before. His eyes rested upon his master's face, and he only waited for the signal to dash on before us. While we were searching the ground for traces of Dandiprat, the dog raised his head and started to bark joyously. This was intended to inform us that it was in the air we should look and not upon the earth.

Sure enough, we discovered that the snow which covered our cabin was trampled down here and there, up to the point where a thick branch bent over our roof. We followed this bough with our eyes, and there, high up in an old oak tree, cuddled up in a fork of it, we perceived a small blot of dark color.

It was Dandiprat, nor was it difficult to guess how he happened to be there. Frightened by the howling of

the dogs and the wolves, instead of remaining in his place by the fire, he had sprung upon the roof of our shelter as soon as we had deserted him. From there he had scrambled up to the top of the oak and, finding a place of safety there, he had cowered down and stuck where he was, without paying any attention to our calls.

The poor little cowardly beast must be frozen through and through.

My master called him softly, but he did not budge any more than if he had been dead. For several minutes Vitalis kept repeating his appeals. Dandiprat showed not the slightest sign of life.

Here was my chance to redeem my negligence of the night before.

"If you wish," I said, "I'll climb up and get him."

"You'll only break your neck."

"There's not a bit of danger."

Of course that statement was not quite true, for there was a good deal of risk. The tree was big, and, besides, it was covered with snow where its trunk and branches had been exposed to the wind.

Luckily, I had learned how to climb trees while I was still quite young, and I had acquired a remarkable ability in this art. Some small branches had sprouted here and there along the tree trunk; these served me as the rungs of a ladder. And, although I was blinded by the snow that my groping hands caused to fall into my eyes, I soon came to the first forking of the tree. From that point my ascent became easy. I only had to be careful not to slip on the smooth surface of the ice.

While I was climbing, I kept speaking gently to Dandiprat, who, though motionless, was studying my progress with shining eyes.

I had almost got to him, and was already stretching out my hand to seize him, when he bounded on to another branch.

I followed him to this place, but men and even boys are inferior to monkeys in the matter of tree-climbing. So it is quite possible that I never should have reached Dandiprat if snow had not covered the boughs. But he was getting his hands and feet so thoroughly soaked that he soon tired of the pursuit, so, descending from one bough to another, he sprang down upon the shoulders of his master and hid himself under the latter's coat.

It was something to have found Dandiprat, but it was not all. The next thing before us was to see about the dogs.

A few steps brought us to the spot where we had been the night before, and where we had found the snow trampled down. Now that it was broad daylight, it was not hard to make out what had gone on there. The snow had preserved the story of the death of the dogs as if it had been carved upon stone.

They had left the hut one behind the other, passing along the wall of fagots, and we were able to follow their tracks distinctly for twenty yards or so. Then trace of them was lost, of course, in the scattered and overturned snow. There we saw other footprints. On one side we saw evidences of where the wolves in long leaps had pounced upon the defenseless dogs; on another, we could

tell where the wolves had carried off their prey after having killed it. There was no other sign of the dogs than the red trail of blood which here and there darkened the snow.

There was no need to pursue our investigations further. The two poor dogs had been slain there and then carried off to be devoured at leisure in some thicket or thornbrake. Besides, we had to busy ourselves at the earliest possible moment in rubbing warmth back into Dandiprat.

We went back to the cabin. While Vitalis was turning the monkey's hands and feet toward the fire, as if he were a wee infant, I was heating his coverlet, and we wrapped him up in it.

But it was not alone a coverlet that he needed — it was a warming-pan and a hot drink, and we had neither the one nor the other. As a matter of fact, we considered ourselves lucky to have a fire.

My master and I sat before the fire, with never a word to say. We crouched there motionless, staring into the flames. But words and looks would have been powerless to express what we were feeling.

"Poor Sport! Poor Dulcie!"

These were the words that we murmured under our breath, or at least the thoughts that were in our hearts. The dogs had been our friends, our comrades for better or for worse. And to me in the days of my distress and my loneliness they had been almost like my children.

And I alone had been responsible for their death. For I could not escape the thought that if I had kept the good

watch that I should have done, if I had not fallen asleep, they would not have wandered away. And then the wolves would not have attacked them. They would have kept their distance, afraid to approach our fire.

I wanted Vitalis to scold me. I should have been glad to have him give me a whipping. But he said nothing — he hardly looked at me. He stayed by the fire, bent over, wondering, without doubt, what was going to become of us without the dogs.

CHAPTER XV

MR. DANDIPRAT

The dawn had foretold beautiful weather, and its prophecy did not fail. The sun shone brightly in a cloudless sky, and its wintry beams were reflected by the spotless snow. The forest which had but yesterday seemed so melancholy and bleak was now fairly dazzling with a splendor that blinded the eyes.

From time to time Vitalis ran his hand beneath the coverlet to feel of Dandiprat, but the little beastie refused to get warm again. And when I bent down close to him I could hear him shivering. It soon became evident that we could not bring back the warmth to the frozen blood in his veins.

"We must reach a village," Vitalis said as he got to his feet, "or Dandiprat will die here. We shall be lucky if he does not pass away on the road. Let's start."

My master warmed his coverlet for the last time, wrapped the monkey up in it, and placed him beneath his coat, next to his heart.

We were ready to go on with our journey.

"This is an inn," said Vitalis, "which has made us pay dearly for the shelter it gave us."

His voice shook as he spoke these words.

He was the first to step out of the hut, and I followed in his footsteps. We had to stop and call Cappy, who had stayed behind in the entrance to the cabin, with his muzzle

turned toward the spot where his comrades had been overcome by the wolves.

Ten minutes after we gained the highroad we came upon a cart. The driver told us that within an hour we should find a village ahead of us. That put new strength into our legs. And yet it was terribly hard, painful even, to forge ahead through the deep snow into which I kept sinking up to my waist.

I would frequently ask Vitalis how Dandiprat was getting along, and he would answer that he could feel him shivering against him.

At last, at the foot of a slope, the white roofs of a big village loomed before us. One last effort and we were there.

We were by no means accustomed to put up at the better sort of taverns, those which by their fine appearance promised good bed and board. Quite the opposite. When we entered a village or its suburbs we would choose some poor house, where we felt pretty sure they would not turn us away and would not empty our slender purse.

But this time was an exception. Instead of stopping at the outskirts of the town, Vitalis went on until he came to an inn before which a beautiful gilded sign was hanging. Through the door of the kitchen, which was wide open, we could see a table loaded down with fine things to eat. And on a large stove several shining copper kettles were humming happily, puffing small clouds of steam ceilingward. From the sidewalk one could smell a fine odor of thick soup which appealed most agreeably to our famished stomachs.

My master assumed his most lordly air, strolled into the kitchen, and with his hat on his head and his chin well up asked the landlady for a good room with a fire in it.

At first the hostess, who was a woman of fine appearance, did not stoop to favor us with a look. But the grand air of my master impressed her favorably, and a maid was instructed to show us a room.

"Hurry and jump into bed," Vitalis said to me while the servant was lighting the fire.

For a moment I was too astonished to move. Why should I go to bed? I much preferred to go to dinner.

"Come on — as quick as you can!" Vitalis repeated.

There was nothing to do but obey. There was a down comforter on the bed. My master tucked me in it up to my chin.

"Try to get warm," he said to me, "the warmer, the better."

It seemed to me that Dandiprat needed heat much more than I did, for I was not cold in the least.

While I was lying beneath the down quilt as still as a mouse, trying to store up warmth, Vitalis, to the great astonishment of the maid, was turning poor Dandiprat round and round as if he was trying to bake him evenly on all sides.

"Are you good and warm?" my master asked a few moments later.

"I'm suffocating."

"That's the very thing I'm after."

And, coming quickly over to me, he thrust the monkey

into my bed, warning me to hold him tight against my breast.

The poor little animal, who was generally so restive when one tried to make him do something he didn't like, seemed resigned to his fate. He held himself pressed close to me without making a movement. He was no longer cold; his body was burning.

My master had gone down to the kitchen. In a few minutes he was back, carrying a bowl of warmed and sweetened wine. He tried to get Dandiprat to swallow a few spoonfuls of this drink, but the little fellow could not open his jaws. He looked at us sadly with his shining eyes, as if pleading with us not to torment him. At the same time he raised one of his arms from the bed and held it toward us. I asked what this gesture meant, and Vitalis explained it to me.

Before I had joined the company, Dandiprat had had inflammation of the lungs, and they had drained some blood from his arm. So now, knowing that he was sick again, he was stretching out his arm for us to bleed, thinking it would cure him as it had done the time before. Could anything have been more touching?

Vitalis' heart was filled with pity, but, more than this, he had become really worried. For it was evident that poor Dandiprat must be very sick, indeed, to refuse the sweetened wine of which he was always so fond.

"You drink the wine, Remi," my master said, "and stay in bed, while I run and get the doctor."

I must confess that I, too, was fond of sweetened wine, and in addition I was almost famished. I didn't

wait, therefore, to be asked a second time. And after I had drunk the bowlful I cuddled down again under the down comforter, which, now that the warmth of the wine got into my veins, almost suffocated me.

My master was not gone long. He soon came back, leading with him a gentleman who wore gold-rimmed spectacles — the doctor.

Fearing that this important personage would not like to bother about the health of a monkey, Vitalis had not told the physician who his patient was. So, the moment he saw me in the bed, red as a newly opened peony, the doctor came to my side, placed his hand on my forehead, and said, "Congestion of the brain." And thereupon he wagged his head doubtfully, with an air that suggested the worst.

It was high time to undeceive him, or he would bleed me, so I said right out, "Oh, I'm not the one that's sick!"

"What's that? Not sick! The child is out of his head."

Without saying a word, I raised the coverlet a bit and showed him Dandiprat, who was lying with one arm clasping my neck.

"There's your patient," I announced.

The doctor fell back a step or two, and then turned to Vitalis.

"What!" he shouted. "You've called me out in such weather as this to attend a monkey?"

I felt morally certain he would go off in a huff.

But our master was a shrewd fellow who did not lose his head over trifles. He checked the doctor's flight

politely, but with his grand manner. He explained the situation to him, telling him how we had been caught in a blizzard and how Dandiprat had been so afraid of the wolves that he perched himself up in an oak tree, where he had almost been killed by the cold.

Of course, Vitalis went on to say, the patient was only a monkey — but what a wonderful beast it was! A comrade to us — and more than that, a friend! How could Vitalis be expected to intrust so gifted a performer to the tender mercies of a veterinary surgeon? Everybody knew that village horse doctors were nothing more than jackasses, whereas the whole world also understood that physicians were, each in his own way, men of science. So well was this fact known that even in the smallest village one had but to ring the doorbell of a doctor to find a wise and generous soul. Besides, although of course a monkey is only an animal, still he was so much like a human being, according to natural scientists, that his very illnesses were identical with those of man. And wasn't it an interesting thing, from the viewpoint of science and art, to study just where such sicknesses were alike, and where they differed?

The Italians are very skillful flatterers. The physician soon left the door where he had been standing, and came back to the bed.

While our master had been talking, Dandiprat had somehow guessed that this spectacled person was a doctor, and at least ten times the creature had drawn forth his little arm for bleeding.

"See how intelligent he is! He knows you are the

kind doctor and is holding up his wrist for you to feel his pulse."

This remark decided the man of science.

"Why, really," he said, "this case is quite interesting."

Alas! it was more than interesting to us — it was sad and unsettling. For Dandiprat, it turned out, was threatened with inflammation of the lungs.

When the doctor held his arm and thrust the lancet into it, the monkey did not utter the slightest complaint. For he believed that this would cure him. After he had been bled, Dandiprat had to have many other attentions. There were medicines to drink, and tonics. Of course, I no longer lay in bed. I rose and became sick-nurse, under the direction of Vitalis.

Poor little Dandiprat loved to have me wait upon him, and he never failed to reward my efforts with a sweet smile. His glance was really just like that of a human being. It seemed as if he felt the need of our constantly showing our love for him. Even Cappy, who had been so often the victim of his malice, had to assure Dandiprat of his affection.

As is always the course of pneumonia, the monkey soon began to cough, and the cramps which convulsed his small body wore him out.

My whole fortune at that time consisted of five pennies, and I spent them all on barley sugar for Dandiprat. Unfortunately, this made his sickness worse instead of better. His sly mind, which seemed to notice everything, taught him that every time he had a fit of coughing I gave him a bit of barley sugar. So he made capital out

of his condition, and coughed as often as he could manage it in order to get another dose of his beloved remedy.

When I discovered what he was up to, I stopped feeding him the barley sugar, but he was not easily discouraged. He began to implore me with his eyes. Then, when he saw that this did not work, he sat up in bed, clapped his hand to his stomach, bent himself almost double, and coughed with all his might. The veins in his forehead would swell, tears would pour out of his eyes, and he would end by almost choking to death. Thus, what had begun in play almost ended in tragedy.

My master had never confided much to me about his business affairs, and it had been only by chance that I had learned how he sold his watch to buy me my sheepskin coat. But, in the difficult situation in which we now found ourselves, he thought it necessary to break his usual rule.

One morning he went down to breakfast, leaving me to attend to Dandiprat, whom we never allowed to be alone. When he came back, Vitalis informed me that the landlady had insisted on his paying our bill, and that he had nothing left but fifty pennies.

What could we do now?

Of course I could not find any answer to such an unexpected state of affairs.

As for my master, the only way that he could find out of his financial difficulty was to give a performance that very afternoon. But what sort of show could we present without Sport, Dulcie, and Dandiprat? That seemed impossible.

But we were not in a position to surrender just because a thing appeared to be impossible. Whatever happened, we must take care of Dandiprat and save his life. The doctor and the medicines, room rent and fire, made it necessary to take in at least forty francs at once so we could pay the landlady. After she had seen the color of our money, she would surely extend us further credit.

Forty francs in this village, in such cold weather, and with the few resources we could draw upon! What a miracle that would be!

While I stayed to look after our patient, my master hunted up a public hall on the market square, for an open-air performance was impossible in zero weather. He composed the advertisements and pasted them up. He built a stage out of a few pieces of lumber. He bravely spent his last fifty pennies for candles, which he cut in two, so as to increase the lighting.

From the window of my room I saw him go and come in the snow, passing back and forth in front of the hotel, as he went about his errands. I began to worry terribly as to what the nature of our performance could be, but I was not allowed to remain long in doubt. For the public crier of the village, with a red cap stuck on his head, took his stand before the tavern and, rolling his drum magnificently, read aloud our program.

Any one acquainted with Vitalis could easily imagine the wild promises he made. First, there was mention of "an actor well known throughout the entire world" — that was Cappy. Then there was to be present "a young singer who was a prodigy of nature" — that was I.

But the most interesting part of this humbugging speech was that there was no fixed charge for seats. This matter was to be left to the generosity of the audience, who after they had witnessed the show could pay what they saw fit.

That seemed to me to be pretty daring, for suppose they did not like the performance? Cappy really deserved to be celebrated, he was so clever. But I had no idea that there was anything marvelous about my abilities.

When they heard the rolling of the drum, Cappy barked joyously and Dandiprat half rose from the bed, although at that moment he was desperately ill. Both of them seemed to guess that the drum had something to do with our performance.

The monkey tried so hard to get up that I had to restrain him by force. Even then he demanded of me his English general's uniform, the red coat and trousers striped with gold braid, the cocked hat with the plume. He clasped his hands together and got on his knees to beg these things of me. When he saw that he could get nothing by begging, he started out to get angry, and then tried tears.

It was certain that we should have our hands full persuading him that he could not act his part that evening. And I thought that under the circumstances the best thing we could do was to keep our departure secret from him.

Unfortunately, when Vitalis returned, he was ignorant of what had happened during his absence. So he began at once to tell me to get my harp ready, as well as all the other properties needed in our performance.

When he heard these well-known words, Dandiprat began to beg all over again, addressing his entreaties this time to his master. If he had been able to speak the human language, he really could not have told what he wanted any better than by the sounds he made, the way he twisted his face, the gestures of his body. Real tears ran down his cheeks; he kept kissing the hands of Vitalis.

"So you want to play tonight?" the latter asked.

"Yes, a hundred times, yes!" Dandiprat's whole soul appeared to cry out.

"But you're too sick, you little monkey!"

"Not any more — at least not much!" Dandiprat indicated.

But of course his master could not grant the poor animal's request, for it would surely have been the death of him.

The hour came to start to the market square. I fixed a fine fire on the hearth, using big pieces of wood which would last a long time. I wrapped the weeping Dandiprat up in his warm coverlet. He gave me one last tight hug, and my master and I departed.

While we were plodding through the snow, my master explained what he wanted me to do. It was out of the question to give our usual plays, because our principal actors were missing. Cappy and I would have to do our level best to make up for them. If the heavens fell, we should still have to take in forty francs.

Forty francs! That was an awfully big sum.

Vitalis had thought of everything, and there remained nothing to do but light the candles. Even this was a

luxury we could not permit ourselves until the public hall was fairly well filled, for the illumination must be sure to last as long as the performance did.

All the time that we were taking possession of our little theater, the town crier was making his last trip through the streets of the village. We could hear the rolling of his drum as it came closer or drew farther away, owing to the direction of the streets.

After I had finished Cappy's toilet and got myself made up, I hid behind a pillar to see the audience come in.

Soon the beating of the drum became more and more audible, and I heard confused noises outside. These last were caused by the voices of some twenty urchins who were marching along behind the crier. Without stopping the drum even for a moment, the crier advanced and took up his post between two lamps at the entrance of our theater. And now, if the public would only walk in and take their seats, we were all ready to begin.

Alas, they were slow enough coming, in spite of the fact that the drummer at the door unceasingly kept up his r-r-ratatat. All the little gamins in the village must have settled themselves in their seats, but it was not such as they who were to be relied on for forty francs' worth of receipts. What we needed was well-to-do people with well-lined purses and hands accustomed to open them. Finally, my master decided that it was time to begin, even though the hall was far from being filled. Besides, we couldn't wait much longer, for we were dreadfully anxious as to the shortage of candles.

It was my part to appear first upon the stage and to

sing two short songs, accompanying myself on the harp. To be quite truthful, I must confess that the applause I won was little enough. I had never had any great idea of my ability as an artist, but, considering the state of our finances, the coolness of the audience made me very unhappy. Surely, if I did not please better than that, they would not open their pocketbooks. It was not for my own fame that I was singing, but for poor Dandiprat. Oh, how I tried to rouse this public and stir them to enthusiasm! And yet, so far as I could see in this hall filled with strange shadows, they did not consider me much of a prodigy.

Cappy was happier in his results. They applauded him several times, as hard as they could.

The entertainment proceeded without a hitch, and, thanks to Cappy, it came to a close amid cries of pleasure. People not only clapped their hands, but stamped loudly with their feet.

The fateful moment had arrived. While on the stage I was doing a Spanish dance, with an accompaniment by Vitalis, Cappy, with the cup in his jaws, made his way past all the rows of the audience. Would he collect forty francs? That was the question that occupied my whole mind as I danced and smiled at the audience in my most agreeable manner.

I was out of breath, but I kept at my work, for I had been told not to stop until Cappy had returned with his collection. He did not hurry in the least. If he was not offered a contribution of some sort, he would pat with his paw the pocket that was shut against him.

At last I beheld Cappy coming back and was on the point of ending my dance, when Vitalis made me a sign to continue. I kept on and, drawing near to Cappy, I looked to see how full his cup was. It was still half empty.

At that moment Vitalis, who had also taken a look at the receipts, arose and stepped forward.

"I think I may say without flattering myself," he began, "that we have carried out our promised program. However, as our candles are still alight, I shall, if the company desires it, sing several songs. Cappy will then circle around again, and people who were not able to locate the openings of their pockets the first time will perhaps be more successful on a second trial. I ask them to have their money ready in advance."

Although Vitalis had been my singing teacher, I had never yet heard him really sing — or, at least, not as he did that evening.

He chose two tunes that everybody knew, the ballad of "Joseph" and the lay of "Richard the Lion-Hearted." I was at that time too young to be a judge as to whether a person sang well or badly, with good technique or with none. But of so much I am sure: my master's singing affected me deeply. I stole away to a corner of the stage and started to cry.

Through the mist that obscured my sight I saw a young woman seated on the front bench clapping her hands madly. I had already observed her, for she was not a peasant like the others in the audience. She was a fine lady, young and pretty, and, so far as one could tell

from her fur mantle, presumably the richest person in the village. She was sitting with a small child, who had been captivated by Cappy's tricks. The little boy must be her son, for the resemblance between them was great.

After the first ballad Cappy went his rounds again, and I noticed with surprise that the pretty lady had put nothing into his cup.

When my master finished singing "Richard," she signaled me with her hand, and I drew near her.

"I should like to speak to your master," she said.

That astonished me. I could not imagine what she had to say to him. She would have done better, I thought, to put her offering into the cup. However, I gave her message to Vitalis just as Cappy was returning. The second trip had been even less successful than the first one.

"What does that lady wish?" Vitalis demanded.

"She wants a word with you."

"I have nothing to say to her."

"She didn't give Cappy a penny. Perhaps she wants to give him something now."

"Then it's Cappy's business to deal with her, not mine."

However, he changed his mind — only he took the dog with him. I trotted along behind.

While we were doing this, a servant made his appearance with a lantern and a rug in his hands. He stood waiting for the lady and her child.

"Pardon me for having bothered you," the lady said, "but I felt that I had to congratulate you."

Vitalis bent his head, without replying.

"I myself am an artist," she continued. "That is why I can appreciate a great talent like yours."

My master a great artist! Vitalis, the street singer, the trainer of dumb animals! I couldn't believe my ears.

"An old fellow like myself is not gifted," he said.

"Please do not imagine that I am trying to pry into what does not concern me," the lady went on.

"But I am quite ready to satisfy your curiosity. You are surprised, I suppose, to hear a dog-trainer sing a little?"

"More than that — I am dumbfounded."

"The story is a very simple one. I have not always been what I am at this moment. Long ago — in my youth — I was — oh, I was the servant of a great singer. And I imitated him, like a parrot. I learned to repeat certain melodies my master used to practice when I was with him. That's all there is to that."

The lady made no response to this, but she gazed long and hard at Vitalis, who stood before her in an attitude of embarrassment.

"Good-by, sir," she said, emphasizing the word "sir" and pronouncing it with a strange inflection. "And again let me thank you for the rare pleasure you have given me." Then bending over Cappy she placed a gold piece in his cup.

I thought Vitalis would walk with this lady to the door, but he made no move in that direction. When she had taken two or three steps away from him, I heard him swear under his breath two or three Italian oaths.

"But she gave Cappy a louis," I said.

I thought he was going to cuff my ears. He raised his hand as if to strike, but let it fall again.

"Twenty francs she gave Cappy?" he asked, as if walking out of a dream. "Oh, yes — true enough! — poor Dandiprat. I had forgotten all about him. Let's go back to him."

Our change was soon made and we hurried straight back to the inn. I climbed the stairs in the lead and flew into the room. The fire was not out, but it was no longer aflame. I lighted a candle quickly and went to look for Dandiprat, surprised not to hear him greet our return.

He was lying on his coverlet, stretched full-length. He was dressed in his general's uniform and seemed to be asleep. I bent over to touch his hand ever so gently so as not to awaken him. It was cold.

At this moment Vitalis entered the room. I turned to him.

"Dandiprat is cold," I said.

Vitalis bent over the bed, close by my side.

"Alas!" he said. "He is dead — it could not be helped. You see, Remi, I was wrong to take you away from Mrs. Milligan. It looks as if I was being punished for my fault. Sport, Dulcie — and now Dandiprat. And this is not the end of it!"

CHAPTER XVI

OUR ENTRANCE INTO PARIS

We were still far distant from Paris.

We had to do our tramping along country roads covered with snow and keep at it from morning to night with the north wind in our teeth.

How wretched these long marches were! Vitalis kept the lead, I followed at his heels, and Cappy was not a foot behind me.

We went on and on thus, in single file, without exchanging a word for hours at a time, our faces purple from the icy gusts, our feet soaked through, our stomachs empty. People whom we passed by stopped to see our parade. It was evident that curious thoughts were darting through their minds. Where could this tall old man be leading the child and the dog?

The continual silence was very hard for me to bear. I needed to talk in order to forget my woes. But Vitalis would only throw me a word or two in answer to my remarks; he would not even turn his head when he spoke to me.

Luckily, Cappy was a much more friendly sort. Often during our walks I would feel a damp and warm tongue on my hand. It would be Cappy licking me, as if to say, "Don't forget I'm right here by you, Cappy, your friend."

At such a time I would pat him gently, but without falling out of my stride.

We marched straight onward with never a breathing spell over roads rough and slippery. At night we paused only long enough to sleep a few hours in a wayside barn or sheepfold. We never had more than a very small piece of bread for our evening repast, which was both dinner and supper for us.

When we had the good fortune to be sent to sleep in a sheepfold, we were happy, indeed, because the heat of the sheep's bodies would protect us somewhat from the cold. And since it is in this winter season that the ewes give milk to their lambs, the shepherds would permit me sometimes to drink a little of this milk.

We did not confess to the shepherds that we were half dead with starvation, but Vitalis in his shrewd way would manage to hint that "the little chap loves ewe's milk, because when young he was accustomed to drink it, and it always reminds him of home." This yarn did not always work, but it meant a happy night for me whenever it did. Yes, it was true enough that I liked ewe's milk, and whenever I got some to drink I felt much better tempered and stronger the next day.

Mile followed mile most drearily. The endless days of marching seemed to drag on forever. And yet I knew that at last we were approaching Paris. It seemed astonishing to me that the countryside did not grow more beautiful, that the villages should be just like those we had been passing through for days. I had heard so much of the wonders of Paris that I had somehow expected these marvels would be proclaimed from afar by one extraordinary sight or another. I don't know exactly what I

was waiting to see. But trees made of gold, streets bordered with marble palaces, citizens dressed in silk garments — all that would have seemed quite natural to me.

But although I was on the lookout for trees of gold, none the less I was aware that the people we met no longer paid any attention to us. I supposed they were too pressed for time to have any left for strangers; or perhaps they were used to seeing processions still more mournful than ours, and so had no look to waste upon us. This was not the least bit promising.

What were we going to do after we reached Paris, particularly in our present desperate condition? That was the question that I longed to ask, that had often occupied my mind during the long marches. I dared not demand the truth of Vitalis, for he was always so dismal, and so curt when he spoke to me.

Finally one day he condescended to sit down by my side. And the way in which he looked at me told me I was at last going to learn what I had so much wished to know.

It was one morning after we had slept in a farmhouse a short distance from a big village, which the blue signposts by the road indicated to be Boissy-Saint-Leger. We had started out at dawn, and, after having skirted the walls of a park and gone the whole length of the town, we had finally from the top of a slope seen before us a great cloud of black smoke which hovered above an immense city. We could distinguish only the most towering buildings of the great place.

Suddenly Vitalis said, "My boy, we are going to part company when we reach Paris."

I turned to look at my master and found him studying my face. It must have been pale, my lips must have trembled, for he saw that there was something wrong with me.

"You are troubled, Remi," he said, "and unhappy, too."

"We are going to part!" I said at last, after the first moment of shock had passed.

"Poor youngster!" he sighed.

These words, and especially the tone in which they were spoken, brought the tears to my eyes. It had been such a long time since I had heard the slightest syllable of sympathy.

"Oh, you are so good to me!" I cried.

"Nay, it is you who are a good sort, a brave little soul! Do you know, there are moments in life when one is inclined to feel such things and to be softened by them? When the sun is shining, each one goes his own way without wasting much thought on those about him. But when the skies are dark and threatening, when one is old and has not much hope in tomorrow, then he needs some one to lean upon, and he is glad to find such a prop beside him. It seems odd to you, I suppose, that I should lean upon you? And yet the truth is that I do. It comforts me, as nothing else could, to see the tears fill your eyes as you listen to me. For, little Remi, I, too, am very unhappy at the thought of parting."

It was not until later in my own life, when I had learned to love, that I realized the truth of his words.

"And the worst of it is," Vitalis continued, "that we

are separating just when we would sooner do the other thing."

"But you won't abandon me in Paris?" I asked shyly.

"By no means. You may be very sure I am not going to desert you. What would you do in Paris, all alone by yourself, poor little lad? And besides, you remember that I have not the right to leave you uncared for. The day when I did not consent to give you to that worthy lady who wished to keep you and bring you up as her own son, that very day I undertook the responsibility of your care the best I knew how. Unfortunately, the fates have worked against me. I cannot do anything for you at this moment, and that's the reason I think it's wisest for us to part, not forever, but only for a few months. In this way we can each find a living during the last months of the bad season. We shall reach Paris in a few hours. What do you think we could accomplish there with a troupe reduced to one performer, Cappy?"

Hearing his name pronounced, the dog came over to camp beside us. First he raised his paw to his ear in military salute, and then he placed it over his heart, as if he wanted to assure us we might trust entirely to his loyalty. In the state of our feelings this made us feel even worse.

Vitalis halted his speech for a moment and stroked the dog's head. Then he went on, "You see, Remi, don't you? We couldn't give performances as we are now fixed, possibly."

"That is true. But how about my harp? Couldn't we try —"

"If I had two lads like you, perhaps we could make out somehow. But an old chap like me, with a single child of your age — that is bad business. In a way, too, I am not old enough. If I were only quite broken down, or even blind! But, unfortunately, I am as I am, and that means I am not in sufficiently bad shape to inspire pity. Besides, I never could bring myself to make an appeal to public charity. So, here's what I have decided: I'll give you until the end of the winter to a *padrone*. He will shelter and feed you. And in return for this you will bring him the money that you earn by playing the harp, along with the other boys who work for him."

"But what will you be doing all this time?" I asked.

"Oh, as for me, I'll give lessons on the harp or the fiddle to the Italian children who work in the streets of Paris. I am known in Paris, I have stayed there more than once. I'll get along all right. I have only to ask for lessons to give, and I'll get more orders than I can fill. Meanwhile, while I am supporting myself with these lessons, I shall have time to train up two dogs to replace Sport and Dulcie. I shall spur on their education as fast as may be, and when spring comes, little Remi, we shall set off on the road once more, never to part. Things will just go fine then. I'll take you to Germany and England — that's where you will broaden and your spirit will expand. I'll teach you lots of things and make a man of you. I have not forgotten my promise to Mrs. Milligan, and I intend to keep it. It is because of these trips we're going to take that I began to teach you English and Italian. That is quite a feather in the cap of a

child of your age — to speak foreign languages. Besides, you have a good mind and body.”

Considering our present condition, perhaps the plan of my master was the best possible. But, no matter how long he talked, I could think of only two things: our separation and the *padrone*.

In our journeyings through towns and villages I had met several such gentlemen — *padrones* who ruled the children whom they had picked up here and there, by beating them with a stick. They were not at all like Vitalis; they were cruel, unjust, and fond of strong drink. And I might fall into the clutches of one of these terrible masters.

And then, even if fate should be kind and give me a kind master, it would be another change.

After my foster mother, Vitalis.

After Vitalis, somebody else.

Was it always going to be that way? Was it possible that I should never find some one to love for good and all?

Little by little I had become attached to Vitalis as to a father. Oh, then I was never to have any father or family. I should always be alone in the world — forever lost on this vast earth, on which I should never have an abiding home.

There were things enough that I might have said in reply to my master's words, and they mounted from my heart to my lips, but I choked them back. For Vitalis had asked me to be brave and to agree to his plan. Very well, I would obey him and not add to his sorrow.

. . . . So, off we started tramping again. We

came to a river, and we crossed it on the dirtiest bridge that I had ever seen. The snow was as black as powdered coal and covered everything with a layer of slushy fluid into which one sank ankle-deep.

At the end of the bridge there was a village of narrow streets which were crammed with the most wretched houses and shops imaginable. In the road there was a constant file of wagons, passing and repassing without interruption. Everything seemed poorer and dirtier than in Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Lyons.

We turned into another street, so long that one could not see the end of it. The snow had been piled in heaps here and there. And on these black and slimy mounds ashes had been thrown — rotting vegetables, decaying garbage of every sort. The air was filled with awful stench. The children who played before the houses had pallid faces.

“Where are we?” I asked Vitalis.

“In Paris, my lad.”

Paris! Why, where were my marble mansions, my citizens clad in rich silks? How terrible was this reality! Was this the city of which I had dreamed so vividly!

And, alas! here it was that I must spend the winter, separated from Vitalis — and Cappy.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PADRONE

For a long time we had been walking in a broad street which was less wretched than those we had previously tramped. And the farther we went, the finer and larger the shops grew. But suddenly Vitalis turned around a corner, and we found ourselves in a most miserable and tumbledown quarter crowded with tenement houses — a veritable slum.

My master seemed to know where he was going, for he threaded his way deftly through the crowds of people who blocked his passage. I stuck close to his side.

"Make sure you don't lose sight of me," he said.

But this warning was needless, for I was treading right on his heels. And, for greater surety, I held on to a corner of his coat.

First we had to cross a big yard and go down a passageway. Then we came to a sort of gloomy and greenish pit, into which surely the sun never shone. The spot was dirtier and more terrible than anything I had ever seen up to that time.

"Is Garofoli at home?" Vitalis asked a man who by the light of a lantern was hanging rags against a wall.

"I don't know. Run on up and see. You know his room — at the head of the stairs, right in front of you."

"Garofoli is the *padrone* of whom I spoke," Vitalis explained to me as he climbed the staircase, whose steps

were covered with a coating of slippery mud. Street, house, steps — these were not of a promising nature. What might the master be?

Without stopping to knock, Vitalis opened the door which faced the landing on the fourth and top floor of the tenement. We found ourselves in a large room, a sort of attic. In the center of this enormous chamber there was a broad empty space, and around this on three sides were beds, a dozen of them. The walls and ceiling were of an indeterminate color. Once upon a time they had been white, but the plaster had been blackened by smoke, dust, and every sort of filth. In places it was scratched and fallen away. Here was a human head drawn in charcoal, and beside it birds and flowers scratched in the plaster.

“Are you hidden away somewhere, Garofoli?” Vitalis asked as he paused in the doorway. “I don’t see anybody. Call out if you’re there. You know who I am.”

Really, the room seemed to be deserted. And yet to my master’s words a weak and whining voice made answer. They were the tones of a child, which said, “Signor Garofoli is out. He won’t be back for two hours.”

The speaker now appeared, a boy some ten years old. He came shuffling toward us, and his odd looks made so vivid an impression upon me that I can still see him in my mind’s eye. One might almost say he had no body at all; his large head was all out of proportion and seemed to be placed right upon his legs, as in the comic valentines that used to be in fashion years ago. His face wore an expression of deep melancholy and gentleness.

Built as he was, he could not be considered good-looking, and yet he attracted one's attention and held it by a sort of sympathy. There was a certain charm which shone in his large limpid eyes, which were as gentle as those of a dog, and his mouth was wistful.

"Are you sure he'll be back in two hours?" Vitalis asked.

"Certain of it, sir. That's dinner time, and no one but him ever serves the meal."

"Well, if he comes in before that, tell him Vitalis will call again two hours from now."

"I shall do so, signor."

I made ready to follow my master, but he waved me back.

"You stay here and have a good rest," he said. "I'll be back."

When he saw that I made an unconscious gesture of terror, he said again, consolingly, "Don't worry, I promise to come."

We heard the sound of my master's heavy footsteps on the stairs. The child, who had been listening for them with his ear glued to the door, then came to me and asked, "You are from my country?"

He spoke Italian, but I answered him in French.

"No," I said, "I was born in France."

"So much the better," he said.

"Why?" I cried. "Do you like French people more than you do Italians?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of myself when I said 'So much the better,' but of you. You see, if you were Italian,

you might perhaps be coming here to work for Signor Garofoli. And that would be too bad!"

These words were not very encouraging.

"Is he a wicked man?"

The child made no reply to this direct question. But the look which he gave me was of the most terrifying eloquence. Then, as if he did not wish to talk any more on this subject, he turned around and went over to a big fireplace which filled the end of the room.

A good fire of refuse wood was burning in this hearth, and in front of it a big iron kettle was boiling.

I walked up to the fire to warm my shins and noticed that there was something strange about this kettle that I had at first overlooked. A narrow tube was fitted into the cover, allowing the steam to escape, but the lid itself was fitted on one side with a hinge, on the other with a padlock.

Now I had learned I must not ask indiscreet questions about Garofoli, but what about the kettle?

"Why should that be fastened that way?" I said.

"So that I can't steal a cup of soup from it. I am intrusted with the cooking, but master has no faith in my honesty."

I could not keep from smiling.

"Oh, you may smile," the child continued sadly, "because you think I am greedy. If you were in my place, perhaps you would be, too. It isn't that I'm one who eats too much — I am starving. And the smell of the soup that comes out of the tube makes me all the more cruelly hungry."

"Signor Garofoli makes you die of hunger!"

"If you work for him, you'll soon learn that one doesn't die of hunger, one just suffers all the time — especially I, who am being punished that way."

"Punished by starving!"

"Oh, I'll tell you about it. For, if you're going to work for Garofoli, my example may teach you a lesson. Signor Garofoli is my uncle, and he took me as an act of charity. My mother is a widow and, as you may well imagine, not a rich one. Well, when Garofoli came to our country last year to get some boys, he brought me back with him — oh, it was terribly hard to leave home, and my weeping mother, and little sister Christina! I was the only boy when we departed, but within a week or so there were a dozen of us, and we started out for France together. When we got to Paris we separated. Some of us were hired out to chimney sweeps or bricklayers. Those who were not strong enough to follow a trade were sent out to sing or play the hurdy-gurdy in the streets. As you can see, I was too weak for any regular work, and it seems I was too unsightly to make a success of begging. So Garofoli gave me two little white mice to exhibit, and he fixed my daily tax at thirty coppers. 'As many pennies of that sum as you lack when you come back at night, so many blows of the stick you will get!' I did my best to collect the sum ordered, but I was often short. And this enraged Garofoli terribly. There was another child like me who showed off white mice. He was taxed forty coppers a day, and he always came home with them —"

"Then why didn't you go out with him and see how he did it?" I asked the deformed Mattia.

"That's just what I did," continued the boy. "And I soon saw why he obtained his forty coppers so easily. Whenever a man and a woman would stop to give us something, the lady would say, 'Give it to the pretty boy, not to the ugly one.' I never went out after that with my comrade, for it's sad enough to get a beating at home, but it's a lot worse to hear evil words spoken of you in the street, before everybody. You don't know how badly it hurts to be called misshapen, because no one has ever said it to you. Well, Garofoli saw that he got nothing by pounding me, so he hit upon a new idea. 'Every penny you are short means just one potato less at supper,' he said. 'Your hide may be tough enough for blows, but perhaps your stomach will be tender for potatoes.' Did threats ever make you do anything you couldn't do without them?"

"Oh, my! Of course not."

"Nor did they help me any. For I can't stretch out my hand on the street and say, 'If you don't give me a copper, I won't get any potatoes for supper.' People who give to beggars certainly don't give for such reasons as that."

"They give to make others happy, don't they?"

"I should say not! They give, first of all, to please themselves. So they give alms to a child if he is pretty, or if he makes them think of a boy they have lost, or because they are feeling nice and warm, while the child is shaking with cold beneath a side door somewhere. Oh,

I had time to study the way people are made, I can tell you!"

"But surely they're not all like that."

"No? Say, you are pretty young and trusting, all right! I didn't get very fat after a month or six weeks of such work, did I? Finally, I got so weak and pale that I would hear people about me say, 'Look at that lad — he's dying of hunger.' And then it was funny how my luck changed! For my look of suffering made people take pity on me. If I couldn't pick up coppers, at least I could count on a piece of bread now and then, or a cup of soup. That was my happy time — only it didn't last. For one day Garofoli saw me in a fruit store, eating a bowl of broth, and then he knew fast enough how I could get along so well without my potatoes. After that he decided he would not send me out to beg, but would keep me at home in the attic to do the housekeeping. It was then that he invented this kettle to keep me from eating while the soup was cooking. Every morning before he leaves, he puts the meat and the vegetables into the pot, locks down the lid with the padlock, and all I have to do is keep it boiling. As the smell of the soup is all I get now, I suppose I'm getting pretty pale again. But I can't be sure, because nobody tells me about it, and there's no looking-glass here to show me."

I did not think it would do any good to tell the child how sick he looked, so I said simply, "You don't seem any whiter than the ordinary person."

"You are only saying that to make me feel happier — I know. But I should like awfully to get good and sick."

I looked at him as if he were crazy to say such a thing.

"You don't understand," he continued, with a smile, "and yet it is all very simple. When you get very sick, either they take care of you or they let you die. If they let me die, then the whole thing is over with — no more hunger, no more blows. And besides, they say that dead people go to heaven to live. So, you see, up there in the sky I can look down on my country and on Mamma. Perhaps I can ask God not to let my sister Christina be unhappy. But now, on the other hand, if they decide to care for me, they'll send me to the hospital. And it would be just fine there."

I had an unreasoning terror of the hospital. Many a time, when out on the road and overwhelmed with fatigue I began to feel a little badly, I only had to think of the hospital to feel like walking right on like a good fellow. So I was astonished at Mattia's words.

"You see I'm fairly sick this minute, but not quite enough yet to scare Garofoli. He's been looking out for that. It's lucky for me that he can't get out of the habit of beating me. A week ago he struck me on the head with a stick. This time I really think something's going to come of it. My head is swollen and there's a big white bump on it. My uncle told me yesterday it was probably a tumor, and from what he said I think it may be pretty serious. It hurts like everything, I have shooting pains under my hair worse than toothache, my head weighs a hundred pounds. At night, when I try to sleep, it's all I can do to keep from groaning and yelling. So I

think that in two or three days they'll decide to send me to the hospital. Oh, I'm glad Garofoli hit me with the stick. Really, now, don't you think I look all done up?"

As he spoke these words, Mattia came over and stood before me, looking me right in the eyes. I did not have the heart to tell him honestly what a terrible sight he was. His large feverish eyes, his hollow cheeks, and his discolored lips fairly horrified me.

"I swear you do look bad enough to go to the hospital," I said.

"Oh, good enough! At last!"

And, despite his dragging leg, he tried to make me a little bow to express his thanks. But almost at once he went over to the table and began to wipe it off.

"We've talked enough," he said. "Garofoli mustn't come back and find that things are not ready."

While he talked, he was hobbling around the table, setting the places and putting down plates. I counted twenty places, so Garofoli must have twenty apprentices, at least. But, as I had seen only a dozen beds, I supposed that the boys slept two in each. What couches they were! No sheets at all — blankets which looked as if they had been bought from a stable when they were no longer warm enough for the horses.

"Is it like this everywhere else?" I asked, terrified.

"What do you mean — everywhere?"

"Oh, all the places where they keep children."

"I don't know — I've never been anywhere else. But you see to it that you don't stay here."

"Where can I go if not here?"

"I don't know. No matter where you land, it'll be better than this awful place."

"No matter where," he had said. That was vague, and in any case how could I take it on myself to change the decision Vitalis had made?

I was wrapped up in my thoughts, not having made any definite plan, when the door suddenly opened and a little fellow entered. He had a fiddle under his arm, and with his free hand he was carrying a big piece of wood that he had picked up somewhere. This stick, of the sort that I had seen by the hearth, showed me clearly where Garofoli got his stock of fire wood, likewise the price of it.

"Give me your stick of wood," said Mattia, walking up to the new arrival.

But, instead of yielding up the piece to his comrade, the boy started away from him, holding his prize behind his back.

"Oh, please — I don't want to!" he said.

"Put it on the fire. It will make the soup cook better."

"I didn't lug it all the way here for your old soup. I've got only thirty-six pennies. And when Garofoli sees this wood, perhaps he won't take it out of me too hard for the four coppers I'm short."

"The stick won't do you any good. You'll have to pay just the same. Everybody gets what is coming to him."

Mattia said that spitefully, as if he were happy to think of his comrade's approaching punishment. I was surprised at the cruel light that came into his gentle face.

It was not till I grew older that I understood how living with wicked people makes a person cruel.

It was now the time for all the pupils of Garofoli to return. One after the other they came dragging in, perhaps a dozen of them in all. On entering, each one hung his instrument on a nail above his bed — a violin, a harp, or a flute. Such as were not musicians, but simply exhibitors of trained animals, thrust their marmots or their guinea-pigs into a cage.

A heavy step was now heard outside on the staircase. I felt sure it must be the *padrone*. And I saw enter the room a little man with a twitching face and a halting gait. He did not wear the Italian costume, but was clad in a gray overcoat.

His first glance fell upon me; it was a look that turned my heart cold.

"What boy is this?" he asked.

Mattia spoke up at once, giving him the message that Vitalis had left with him.

"So Vitalis is in Paris, eh? Well, what does he want?"

"I don't know," Mattia answered politely.

"Shut up. I'm not talking to you, but with this lad."

"My *padrone* will be back shortly," I replied, not daring to tell the truth openly. "And he himself will explain what he wishes."

"Hello! Here's a lad who knows the value of words. You aren't Italian?"

"No. I am French."

As soon as he had come into the room, two boys went

up to Garofoli and stood beside him until he had finished what he wanted to say. What was their purpose? My curiosity in this regard was soon satisfied.

One of the two took his felt hat and went to place it gently upon a bed, the other drew up a chair for him. From the gravity and the respect they showed in doing these small acts of politeness, one might have thought them two choir boys hovering devotedly about a priest. All this showed me to what a degree Garofoli was feared. For you may be sure it was not affection that caused the lads to bustle about so.

When Garofoli was seated, another child ran up quickly to bring him a pipe loaded with tobacco and at the same moment a fourth youngster handed him a lighted match.

"It smells of sulphur, animal!" he shouted, as he touched the match to the top of his pipe. And he threw it into the fireplace.

The guilty lad hastened to repair his mistake. Lighting a new match, he allowed the sulphur to burn off before handing it to his master. But the *padrone* would not accept it.

"Get out, you idiot!" he said, giving the child a rough push. Then he turned to another boy with a smile that certainly seemed a mark of especial favor.

"Riccardo, my dear little chap, a match, please."

And the "dear little chap" made all haste to obey.

"Now," remarked Garofoli, when he was comfortably settled and his pipe was drawing well, "shall we run over our accounts, my little angels? Mattia, bring the book."

The master waved his hand, and the child who had offered him the ill-smelling match stepped forward.

"You owe me a penny from yesterday, and you promised to make it good today. How much have you brought?"

The child hesitated a long time before replying. He grew quite red in the face.

"I'm one penny behind again," he said.

"Ah, you are still short this one copper? And you say that as if it made no difference whatsoever?"

"It isn't yesterday's copper I lack, but today's."

"Then that makes two pennies. Why, you're the worst I've ever seen!"

"It wasn't my fault."

"Don't give me any of your lip! You know the rules. Take off your coat. You get two stripes for yesterday, two stripes for today, and no potatoes, besides, because you are cheeky. Riccardo, my dear, you deserve a reward for being so nice. You can give the lashes."

Riccardo was the child who had brought the good match with such readiness. He took from its hook on the wall a short-handled whip which ended in two leather thongs with a big knot in each. Meanwhile, the boy who had been one penny short rid himself of his coat and stripped down his shirt so that he was bare to the waist.

"Wait a moment before you start," said Garofoli, with an evil grin, "perhaps you are not the only cheater. And it is always pleasant to have company. Besides, Riccardo will not have to bother more than once."

The children stood before their master without mov-

ing a muscle. They did their best to laugh at his cruel joke.

"I feel sure the boy who laughed loudest is the most behindhand in his earnings," said Garofoli. "Which one laughed so hard?"

Nearly every hand pointed at the lad who had come in first with the stick of wood in his hand.

"Come, out with it, you there! How much do you owe?" Garofoli demanded.

"It isn't my fault."

"From now on, any one who answers, 'It is not my fault,' will get one more lash than is due him. How much did you lack?"

"I brought you a stick of wood, this fine log here."

"Well, that's something, at least. Suppose you go to the baker and ask him to give you bread for that stick of wood, do you think he will? How many pennies short are you? You'd better tell me pretty quick."

"I made thirty-six pennies."

"Then you're four on the wrong side of the ledger, you miserable scamp! Off with your shirt! Riccardo, my dear, you're a lucky dog, you're going to have a lot of fun."

"But how about the stick of wood?" whined the boy.

"I'll serve it to you for your dinner."

This stupid joke brought a grin to the faces of all the children who were not to be whipped.

Before the examination was ended, he had dealt with a dozen children — they all came forward in turn to square their accounts. In addition to the two already

condemned to the lash, he found three more who had not made up the amount of their tax.

"There are then five brigands who are stealing from me and robbing me of my money," Garofoli cried in a raging tone of voice. "That's what I get for being too generous. How can I pay for the good food and the fine potatoes I give you if you won't work? You prefer to play? Very well, then — off with your coats!"

Riccardo stood ready with the whip. The five criminals ranged themselves in a row before him.

"You know, Riccardo," said Garofoli, "I do not like to see you when you are at work, for these punishments always make me ill. But I shall listen. And I can judge the force of the blows by the noise that follows them. Go to it with a will, my dear. You are working for your supper."

He turned his face to the fire, as if he really could not bear to be witness of the execution. I cowered, forgotten, in my corner, quaking with indignation and with fear. This was the man who was to be my master. If I should fail to report with the thirty or forty pennies that he was pleased to demand of me, I should have to bare my back to Riccardo. Ah, now I understood why Mattia could speak so calmly of death, and with such a feeling of deliverance!

The first crack of the whip as it struck flesh made the tears spring to my eyes. I fancied that I had been forgotten, so I did not restrain myself. But I was mistaken. Garofoli was peering at me from the corner of his eye, I soon had proof of that.

"Here is a child with a tender heart," he said, pointing his finger at me. "He is not like you robbers who laugh at the misfortune of your comrades and at my distress. Although he is not yet a comrade of yours, he may serve you as a good example."

Their comrade! This word made me shiver from head to foot.

At the second blow of the whip, the condemned boy let out an awful groan, at the third lash he uttered a harrowing yell.

Garofoli raised a hand, Riccardo suspended his whip.

I thought the *padrone* was going to show mercy, but that was farthest from his thoughts.

"You know how ill your shrieks make me," Garofoli said, gently addressing his victim. "You know that if the whip cuts your flesh, your cries rend my soul. Therefore I warn you that you will receive an extra lash for each cry, and you will have only yourself to blame. If you have any fondness for me, you will be silent. Go ahead, Riccardo!"

The lad raised his arm again, and the thongs curled around the back of the unfortunate boy.

"Mamma! Mamma!" he cried out.

Happily, I saw no more of this scene, for at that moment the door opened and Vitalis entered the room.

A single glance taught him what the cries he had heard on his way up the stairs had already suggested. He ran to Riccardo and snatched the whip out of his hand. Then he turned quickly to Garofoli, whom he confronted with folded arms.

All this had happened with such lightning speed that the *padrone* sat there stupefied. But he recovered himself quickly, and, resuming his gentle smile, he asked, "Isn't it just terrible?" And he added, "That child has no heart at all."

"It's a shame, that's what it is!" cried Vitalis.

"That's exactly the way I feel about it," Garofoli said.

"Don't try your dirty humbug on me," my master went on, angrily. "You know well enough I'm talking about you and not about the poor child there. Yes, it's cowardly mean to torment little boys who cannot defend themselves."

"What are you interfering for, you old fool?" Garofoli cried, changing his tone.

"Other people will mix in — the police, for instance."

"The police!" Garofoli called out, getting up from his chair. "You threaten me with the police? You?"

"Yes — I!" answered my master, without yielding an inch to the fury of the *padrone*.

"Listen, Vitalis," the latter said, suddenly becoming calm and assuming a mocking tone, "don't you stir up trouble and threaten me. For if you start to talk, why, I can do a little of that, too. And then who will be the one to get hurt? I certainly am not going to say anything to the police. Your affairs do not interest them. But they do interest certain other people, and if I tell them what I know — if I just speak one name — who will have to hide his head in shame, then, eh?"

My master stood still an instant without replying. His shame? I was stupefied. But before I had recov-

ered from my surprise at this strange conversation, he had seized me by the hand.

"Follow me," he said. He led me toward the door.

"Oh, indeed!" Garofoli called after him, laughing.

"No hard feelings, old fellow! Is there something you wish to say to me?"

"I have nothing to say to you."

And without another word, without a backward look, he stamped down the staircase, holding me tightly by the hand. What a relief it was to be with him again! I had really escaped Garofoli's clutches. If I had dared, I should have kissed Vitalis.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GENTILLY RACE TRACK

As long as we were on the street where people were passing, Vitalis walked along without saying a word. But before long we found ourselves in a deserted alleyway. And then he sat down on a milestone and rubbed his forehead several times with his hand — a sign that he was embarrassed.

"It is perhaps a fine thing to listen to the promptings of kindness," he said, as if to himself, "but here we are down and out in Paris, without a copper in our pockets or a piece of bread in our stomachs. Are you hungry?"

"I've eaten nothing since the little crust you gave me this morning."

"You poor little creature! You are condemned to go to bed tonight without any dinner. And even then, where in the world are we going to sleep?"

"You counted on sleeping at Garofoli's?"

"I thought you would be sheltered there. He would have given me twenty francs for your winter's work, and I could have gotten along somehow for the time being. But when I saw how he treated the children, I lost control of myself. You didn't want to stay there, did you, Remi?"

"Oh, you are so good to me, master!"

"The heart still beats warm in this old rover. The trouble is, the vagabond in him calculates shrewdly and

then his heart comes along and upsets his well-laid plans. Where shall we turn now?"

It was already late, and the cold that had moderated during the day was now back in full force. A bitter and icy wind blew from the north. The night would be a hard one.

Vitalis stayed on his milestone a long while. Cappy and I hung around waiting for him to make up his mind. At last he arose.

"We are going to Gentilly," he murmured, "to see if we can find a race track where I used to sleep. Are you tired out?"

"I rested up at Garofoli's."

"The worst of it is, I didn't get any rest, and I'm just about worn out. Well, my children, we'll have to start some time. Let's go."

This was the humorous phrase he always used with the dogs and me, but tonight he said it sadly.

Well, here we were, then, tramping the Paris streets. The night was black, and the wind made the lamps flicker so badly that their gas lighted the road but poorly. We slipped at every other step on either a frozen puddle or a sheet of ice that formed a film on the sidewalk. Vitalis clung to my hand, Cappy brought up the rear. From time to time he lagged behind to hunt for a bone or a crust in the piles of filth, for hunger was pinching him, too. But the refuse was one solid block of ice, and his search was vain. With drooping ears he would come trotting back to join us.

We kept trudging along past broad streets and

narrow lanes. The few people we met stared at us in much amazement. Whether it was our costumes or our weary gait, I could not guess. The policemen we came across turned around and gave us a second and a searching glance.

However, without wasting effort in speech, Vitalis plowed along, his body bent almost double. In spite of the extreme cold, his hand burned in my clasp; I thought he was shivering. Sometimes when he halted, to lean for a moment on my shoulder, I felt his body quivering as with ague.

Ordinarily I should not have run the risk of asking him too many questions, but this time I broke my rule. Besides, I felt a real need to tell him how much I loved him, and to say that I would do anything he wanted.

"You are sick!" I said, as we paused for an instant.

"I suppose I am. Anyway, I am fagged out. These long days of padding the road have been too much for my age, and tonight's cold is too sharp for my ancient blood. I should have liked a good bed, supper in a warm room, and a blazing fire. But that's all a dream — on our way, children!"

On our way! We had left the town behind us; at least there were no more houses. Sometimes now we were between double rows of walls, at other times out in the open country. No more people were abroad to stare at us, no policemen, no street lamps with little points of light. Now and then we saw a bright window, but for the most part there was nothing above our heads but the dark sky pricked out here and there with stars.



The night was black, and the wind made the lamps flicker

The wind, which kept increasing in violence and sharpness, plastered our clothes against our frail bodies. Fortunately, it was at our backs. But as the armholes of my coat were ripped open at the seams the cold entered there and slid down my bones until I was chilled through and through.

Although it was dark and the streets kept branching off every little way, Vitalis went ahead like a man who knows his bearings perfectly. I followed him with no fear of getting lost, only worrying at the thought that we never seemed to get any closer to that race track. Then, all at once, my companion stopped.

"Do you see a clump of trees?" he asked.

"I can't see anything at all."

"Not even a black mass anywhere?"

I peered around on every side before I answered him. We were apparently in the midst of a prairie, for my sight was lost in the dark shadows of the horizon without meeting a single object, like a tree or a house. Empty space everywhere! No other sound but the whistling of the wind along the ground through invisible underbrush.

"Oh, for a good pair of eyes!" Vitalis sighed. "But my sight is dim. Look over there!"

He stretched his right hand in front of him. Then, as I made no response, for I couldn't bear to say that I saw nothing, he began to forge ahead again.

Several minutes went by in silence. Then again he halted and demanded once more whether I did not see the clump of trees now. I had lost the sense of security which I had had up until that time, and a vague fear

made my voice tremble when once more I reported that there was nothing to be seen.

"Fear makes your eyes blind," Vitalis chided me.

"Oh, but I'm sure there are no trees there!"

"And no highway?"

"Just nothing at all but emptiness."

"We've got it wrong somehow."

I had nothing to say, for I knew neither where we were nor whither we were heading.

"Let's walk along another five minutes, and if we don't come upon the trees by that time we can turn around again. I must have lost my way."

The moment I realized we had gone astray, all my strength left me. Vitalis tugged at my arm.

"What has come over you, you laggard!"

"I can't go on any longer."

"Well, do you think I can carry you? The only thing that keeps me up on my feet is the knowledge that if we sit down to rest we shall never move again — we'll die right here of cold. Come on!"

I stumbled along after him.

"Are there any deep ruts in the road?" he asked after a few moments of desperate effort.

"Not one."

"Then we must retrace our steps."

The wind which had been tearing at our backs now struck us full in the face the second we wheeled about. It strangled us. I felt as if I were being scorched by heat.

We had gone slowly enough before this, but from this moment we fairly crawled along.

"Let me know when you see the ruts," Vitalis panted. "The good road runs off to the left from there. The crossroads is marked by a thorn tree."

For a quarter of an hour we advanced thus, struggling with the wind. The noise of our steps on the stiffened earth rang out upon the weird silence of the night. Although I could scarcely drag one leg after the other, I was now leading Vitalis. With what anxiety I explored the left side of the road!

A small red star suddenly pierced the darkness.

"A light," I said, pointing with my hand.

"Where is it?"

Vitalis peered in the direction indicated. But, although the light was gleaming only a short distance off, he could not see it. From that I knew his sight must be growing very weak, for ordinarily he was far-sighted and could see well at night.

"What good does a light do us here?" he said. "It is some lamp burning on the table beside a worker or near the bed of a dying man. Out in the country during the night we might be able to beg for shelter, but here in the suburbs of Paris there's no use of our knocking at any door. It would not be opened. Come on!"

For some moments more we advanced, and then it seemed as if I saw a road that cut across our own, and at the corner of the crossing was a black mass which should be the thorn tree. I dropped the hand of Vitalis to run on ahead and make sure. The road was lined with deep ruts.

"Here's the black thorn!" I cried. "And the ruts, too!"

"Give me your hand. We are saved, for the race track is not five minutes away. Look carefully and you will see the clump of trees."

I saw something like a dark blur, and said that I had found the place he wanted.

Hope gave us renewed energy, my limbs were less heavy, the ground felt less hard beneath my feet.

However, the five minutes spoken of by Vitalis seemed endless.

"Haven't we been going along the right road far enough?" he demanded, as he stopped.

"It seems so to me."

"Which way do the ruts run?"

"They keep on straight ahead."

"The entrance to the race track ought to be on the left. We must have passed it without noticing. In such thick darkness nothing would be easier to do. Nevertheless, the ruts show that we have gone too far."

"I assure you they haven't turned to the left once."

"We'll have to retrace our steps, just the same."

Once more we wheeled about and went back.

"Do you see the clump of trees again?"

"Yes, over yonder at the right."

"And how about the ruts?"

"There aren't any."

"Have I grown blind?" Vitalis asked himself, as he passed his hands across his eyes. "Let's turn right, toward the trees. You give me your hand once more."

"Here is a wall, master."

"It must be only a heap of stones."

"No, it's a wall, and no mistake."

It was easy to test my statement, for the wall was but a few steps away. Vitalis walked over, and, as he could no longer trust his eyes, he thrust his hands against the obstacle I had called a wall, but that he had thought to be a pile of stones.

"Sure enough, it's a wall," he confessed. "The stones in it are arranged in regular order, and I can feel the mortar, too. But where is the gateway to the track? Look for the ruts."

I stooped down to the earth and followed the wall to its end without finding the faintest trace of a rut in the road. Then I came back to Vitalis and continued my search on the other side of him. The result was the same: everywhere a wall, but no opening through it. Nor was there to be found a path, a furrow, a groove of any sort that indicated a doorway.

"I find nothing but snow," I reported.

The situation was terrible. There was no doubt but that my master had lost his way, and the race track we sought simply was not there.

"Shall we search further?" I asked.

"No. The track must be closed — walled up."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, that they have closed the opening into it, and it's impossible for us to get in and find shelter."

"What is there left to do?"

"The one thing left us seems to be death."

"Please don't talk that way, master."

"Aha! You don't feel like dying, eh? That's because

you're young and life has hold of you. All right, let's go on, then! Can you make it?"

"I can. But how about you, sir?"

"When I can't stumble ahead any longer, I'll die like an old horse in my tracks."

"Which way shall we turn now?"

"Go back toward Paris. When we meet policemen, we'll have them take us to the station. I wanted to avoid that, but anything's better than dying of cold. Forward march, little Remi! Keep a stiff upper lip!"

And we turned around and went back the way we had come. What hour of the night was it? I had not the slightest notion. We had been walking for a long time and very slowly. It was midnight at least, perhaps one o'clock in the morning. The sky was still the same deep blue, there was no moon, the few stars there were appeared to be smaller and paler than usual. The wind, far from calming down, was raging with renewed force, it stirred up clouds of snowy powder and whipped them in our faces. The houses we passed were closed and dark. It seemed to me that if the people sleeping inside there, so warm beneath their coverings, only knew how cold we were outside, they would have thrown wide their doors to us.

If we had walked fast we should have been able to endure the cold more easily, but now Vitalis moved forward only with great difficulty. He was panting, as if he had run a long distance. When I asked him something he made no answer, but only signed to me with his hand that he could no longer talk.

We were now coming into town from the open country; at least we were walking between walls, on top of which rickety street lamps were swaying about, here and there, with a great clatter of rusty iron.

Vitalis stopped suddenly. I knew he was exhausted.

"Shan't I knock at one of these doors?" I asked.

"No. They wouldn't open. This is where the truck gardeners live — they're never up at night. Let's keep going."

His spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak. After a few steps he had to halt again.

"I must rest a little," he said. "I can't stand up."

We were standing near a gate in a high board fence. Above the palings there loomed a big heap of fertilizer such as one often sees in the farm plots of florists and market gardeners. The wind had torn at this heap and had loosened the top covering of straw from it, scattering it thickly about in the street below the board wall.

"Here's where I rest my weary bones," said Vitalis.

"But you said if we once sat down we'd be overcome by the cold and never get up again," I objected.

He did not answer me, but motioned with his hand to pile the straw against the door. And he fairly fell upon this. His teeth were chattering and his whole body heaving.

"Get more straw," he said. "This heap of fertilizer will shelter us from the wind."

From the wind, yes, but not from the cold. When I had dragged together every last bit of straw I could find, I threw myself down beside my master.

"Creep close to me," he begged. "And hold Cappy on your breast; he'll give you some of his heat."

Was Vitalis really conscious of the danger that we ran at this moment? Did he expect that this was the end? I never knew. But when I had piled the straw up on me and had thrust my body close to his, he bent his head down to mine and kissed me. It was the second time that this had happened. And it was the last.

Scarcely had I cuddled close to Vitalis when I was overcome and my eyes shut tight. I tried hard to open them, and when I found I could not raise my heavy lids, I started to pinch my arms as hard as I could. But they were numb; the feeling had gone out of my flesh. Cappy was already asleep on my legs, which I had drawn right up against my chest. Above our heads the wind kept up its raging and covered us with wisps of straw, as if they were dried leaves drifting down from autumn trees. Not a living soul in the street — near us, far away, around us everywhere, the silence of death.

The awful stillness frightened me. Of what was I afraid? I could not think clearly enough to make sure about anything, but an unreasoning terror and a profound sadness filled my eyes with tears. I felt sure I was about to die.

This feeling took my mind back to Chavanon and poor Mother Barberin. Should I die without seeing our house again, without revisiting my little garden? By what magic of fancy I do not know, but I found myself again walking the paths of this garden plot. The sun was shining there, warm and beautiful. Jonquils were open-

ing their buds of gold, blackbirds were singing in the bushes and on the hawthorn hedge. Mother Barberin was spreading out the clothes that she had just washed in the brook which sang its way over the pebbles.

And quickly my spirit left Chavanon and swept to meet the "Swan." Arthur was sleeping on his bed. Mrs. Milligan had wakened and was listening to the sighing of the wind; she was just that moment asking me if I was not very cold.

Then my eyes closed again, my heart itself seemed to grow numb, and I swooned off into emptiness.

CHAPTER XIX

LISE

When I came to my senses, I was in bed. The flames of a big fire lighted up the room in which I was lying.

I looked about me, but could not recognize my surroundings. Nor could I tell who the people were who were grouped about me. One of them was a man in a gray coat and yellow clogs; then there were three or four children, among them a little girl of five or six years who was staring at me with wistful and unblinking eyes.

I made a movement as if to get up. They hurried closer to my side.

"Vitalis?" I asked, fearfully.

"He wants to know about his father," said a young girl who appeared to be the eldest of the children.

"He's not my father, he's my master. Where is he? Where's Cappy?"

If Vitalis had been my father, they would probably have been a little more careful in speaking to me about him. But as they learned he was only my master, they thought it sufficient to tell me the blunt truth, and here is what they said:

The gateway in which we had been crouching belonged to the farm of a wholesale florist. About two o'clock in the morning this fellow had opened the gate to drive to market, and he had discovered us half buried beneath our blanket of straw. The florist had ordered us

to get up, so that his wagon could pass. But when he saw that neither of us budged, and that Cappy alone could reply, barking in our defense, he got down and took us by the arms to draw us to one side. Again, neither of us made a move. Then a lantern was brought, because he realized something serious must be the matter. The result of the examination was that Vitalis was found to be frozen to death, while I did not seem to be much better off. But, as I had managed to keep more heat in my body because of Cappy perched upon my chest, I had offered more resistance to the cold and was still breathing. They had carried me to the florist's house, and there they had put me into the bed of one of the children, who had had to get up and dress to make room for me. I had lain there six hours at the point of death, but then the circulation of my blood began again, my breathing had gained in strength, and I had wakened.

"And where is my master's body?" I wished to know.

"We notified the police, and they came and took it away," said the man in the gray smock. He was the florist who had found us on his way to market.

"And Cappy?" I persisted.

"Cappy? Is that the name of some one?"

"Yes, the dog."

"I don't know, except that he has vanished."

"He followed the stretcher," said one of the children.

"You saw him, didn't you, Benjamin?"

"I should say so. He was trailing the heels of the stretcher-bearers, and from time to time he'd jump up by the body. Then, when they'd make him get down, he'd

lower his head, utter a whining cry, and moan sort of strangled-like."

Poor Cappy! How often, in his rôle of comedian, had he followed the make-believe funeral of Sport! At such a time he would wear a mournful air and heave sighs until the children in his audience were almost dead with laughter.

The gardener and his children left me alone finally, and without having any special aim in mind I got up and dressed.

My harp had been leaned against the footboard of the bed on which I had been lying. I passed the strap over my shoulder and went into the room that the gardener and his children had entered. I had to be off, of course, but where was I to go? Besides, dead or alive, I wished to have one more look at Vitalis.

While I had been lying in bed, slowly coming to my senses, I hadn't been feeling any too well, stiff and bruised all over, with an unbearable burning in my head. But as soon as I was on my feet a sudden dizziness overtook me and I had to clutch at a chair to keep from falling. Still, after a moment of rest, I pushed open the door and found myself in the presence of the florist's family.

They were seated at table beside a fire that flamed high up the chimney breast, and were on the point of eating a fine cabbage soup.

The odor of the food almost made me faint and cruelly recalled the fact that I had eaten nothing the evening before. I staggered about somewhat wildly; my deathly weakness was written in my face.

"Are you feeling bad, my lad?" the gardener asked in a tender voice.

I answered in a few words, saying I was sick and begging permission to sit down an instant by the fire.

But it was not heat I needed, it was food. The fire failed to refresh me, and the fumes of the soup, the sound of the spoons against the plates, the smacking noise with which the children ate — these things increased my weakness visibly.

If I had dared, I should have asked for a bowl of soup, but Vitalis had taught me never to hold out my hand for things, and it was against my nature to beg. I should sooner have starved to death than say, "I'm hungry." I don't quite know why, unless it was that I did not care to ask for favors which I could not return.

The little girl who had looked at me so strangely when I woke up sat opposite me. And instead of eating she looked at me without lowering or shifting her gaze. All at once she rose from the table, took a bowlful of soup, brought it over to me, and set it upon my knees.

Weakly, for I seemed to have lost my voice, I waved a hand to show her I was grateful. Before I could say anything her father spoke.

"Accept it, my lad," he said. "Lise means to be generous. And if you feel like having another helping, there's more where that came from."

If I felt like having more! The bowlful of soup disappeared inside of me before you could turn around. When I laid down my spoon, Lise uttered a little cry which this time was not a sigh but rather an exclamation

of satisfaction. The strange child kept standing right in front of me and staring. Then she took my plate, handed it to her father for refilling, and when it was brimming again she brought it to me with a smile so sweet and encouraging that, in spite of my hunger, I waited an instant before reaching out for the soup.

As the first time, the soup again disappeared most promptly. The children no longer looked at me with a smile, they opened their lips wide in laughter.

"You're a hearty feeder and no mistake," said the florist.

I blushed to the roots of my hair. But after a moment I thought it better to acknowledge the truth than to be suspected of greediness. So I answered I had not eaten the previous evening.

"How about noonday dinner?"

"Didn't have any."

"And your master?"

"Went without food just like me."

"Then he died of hunger as much as from cold."

The soup had brought my strength back to me. I got out of my chair to say good-by.

"Where are you going from here?" the father asked.

"To find Vitalis and have one last look at him."

"Know where they took him?"

"No, but I'll have to ask the police."

"Have you friends in Paris?"

"No, sir."

"Where are your lodgings?"

"We didn't have any. We just got here yesterday."

"What are you going to do?"

"Play my harp, sing songs in the street, and get a little money together."

"In Paris? You would be wiser to go back to your people in the country. Where do your parents live?"

"Haven't any. My master bought me from the husband of my foster mother. You have been good to me, sir, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. If you want me to, I'll come back Sunday and play music for you to dance."

I had said all this on my way to the door. But I had taken only a few steps in that direction when Lise, who was following me, seized my hand and pointed to my harp. One could not mistake the meaning of her wistful smile.

"You want me to play?" I asked.

She nodded her head and clapped her hands gaily.

I grasped my harp, although I was not in the mood for dancing or laughter. And I started to play a waltz, my really good one that was always at my finger tips. Oh, how I wished I could play as well as Vitalis to please this little girl who thrilled my heart so with her eyes!

At first she listened to my music, looking at me with her steady stare. Then she kept time with her feet, and before long she was whirling about in the kitchen, the while her brothers and her older sister remained quietly seated in their chairs. She did not know how to waltz, of course, and she did not take the ordinary steps, but she danced with much grace and with shining face.

Seated at the fireplace, her father followed her with

his eyes. He seemed much stirred and applauded her loudly with his hands. When the waltz was finished and I paused, she glided over to me and dropped me a pretty curtsey. Then at once she tapped my harp with her fingers as a sign that she wished an encore.

I would have played all day for her, with pleasure. But her father said that was enough, because he did not want her to tire herself out dancing. So, instead of playing another dance melody, I sang the Neapolitan ballad that Vitalis had taught me. It was a sweet and melancholy air, with a tender touch to it that never failed to stir the heart.

While I was singing the opening bars, Lise stood in front of me, her eyes fixed on mine, moving her lips as if she was repeating the words of the song after me. Then, as the tone of the ballad became more sad, she turned softly away from me, and at the last stanza she threw herself weeping on her father's lap.

"That's enough for now," he said.

"Isn't she foolish?" said the brother known as Benjamin. "First she dances around and then she cries."

"Not so silly as you are! She understands music, and you don't," her older sister said, as she bent over to kiss Lise's cheek.

While Lise was sobbing in her father's arms, I shouldered my harp and started off for the door again.

"Whither away?" the florist called to me. "What do you say to living here with us and working? Here you can at least find a good bed, enough to eat, and a place by the fire. If you accept, you'll have to get up early, dig in

the garden all day, moisten the bread you earn with the sweat of your brow. But you can be sure of your living, you'll never have to sleep out under the stars as you did last night, dying abandoned at the bottom of some ditch. At night you will find food to eat and a bed ready, and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you have earned both. And finally, if you are the good boy that I think you are, you will find in us your family."

Lise turned her head about and looked at me, smiling through her tears. I was so overcome by the florist's proposal that I hesitated a moment, scarcely trusting that my ears had heard aright.

"Well," repeated the father, "how does it strike you?"

A family!

I was going to have a family of my own! Oh, how often this blissful dream had tantalized my mind, only to vanish into thin air! Mother Barberin, Mrs. Milligan, Vitalis — one after the other they had failed me.

I should no longer be lonely.

My position was terrifying. I had seen a man die with whom I had lived for several years and who had been almost a father to me. At the same time I had lost my comrade and friend, the dear good Cappy whom I had loved so dearly. But now that the gardener was proposing that I stay with him, a feeling of trust and confidence strengthened my heart.

All then was not over for me; life would begin anew. What touched me especially, much more in fact than the secure living of which the florist had spoken, was this group I saw so united, this home life promised me.

These boys would be my brothers, pretty little Lise would be my sister. In my childhood dreams I had more than once imagined I should find again my father and mother, but I had never even thought of brothers and sisters. And that was what was now being offered to me. It would surely not be hard to love them, and to make them return my fondness, for they seemed inclined to be so kindly.

Quickly I slipped the strap of my harp off my shoulder.

"So that's the answer," said the father, smiling. "And it's the right one, for I can see my offer is agreeable to you. Hang your instrument on this hook, my lad. The day you get tired of us you can take it down and go your way again. Only, you must be careful to imitate the swallows and the nightingales and choose the proper time of year for your wanderings."

"I shall go away but once, and that will be to find Vitalis," I told him.

"And that's as it should be," the worthy man replied.

My new family was composed of five people: the father, a florist whose name was Pierre Acquin, two boys, Alexis and Benjamin, and two daughters, Etiennette, the oldest of the children, and Lise, the youngest.

Lise was dumb. She had not been born with this affliction. In fact, she had spoken for two years of her life; but just before she reached her fourth year she had lost the power of speech. This accident, the result of convulsions, had happily not affected her intelligence in any way; on the contrary, she was quite bright. She seemed

to understand everything that was said and to be able to express herself remarkably well.

When Mme. Acquin died, Etiennette had become the mother of her family. Instead of going to school, she **had** to stay at home, prepare the meals, sew on buttons, patch the clothes of her father and her brothers, and carry Lise about in her arms. They had forgotten entirely that she was a daughter of the house — and a sister — they had grown so accustomed to think of her as an uncomplaining servant, one who never left the house and never lost her temper.

She tended Lise, dragged Benjamin around by the hand, worked all day. She rose before dawn to make her father's soup before he left for market; she went to bed late, as she had to put everything in order after the evening meal was done. Etiennette had never had time to be a child herself, to play and laugh like other girls. At fourteen years of age her face was sad and worried looking, like that of a spinster of thirty-five, lighted, however, with a beam of sweetness and resignation.

It was not five minutes after I had hung my harp on the hook which had been pointed out that I had begun to tell the family the story of how we had been overcome by cold and fatigue on our way back from the Gentilly race course, where we had expected to find shelter. Just as the tale was well under way, there was a loud scratching at the door that opened on to the garden, accompanied by a plaintive barking.

"There's Cappy!" I cried, springing up quickly. But, fast as I ran, Lise was there before me, opening the door.

Poor Cappy reached my side with one leap, and when I had taken him up in my arms he began to lick my face, uttering sharp little cries of joy. His whole body was shaking.

"And Cappy?" I said to Father Acquin.

My question was understood.

"Why, Cappy is to stay with you," he answered.

As if he knew just what was going on, the dog jumped out of my arms, placed his right paw above his heart, and made a bow. This made the children laugh outright, especially Lise, and to amuse them further I wanted Cappy to play them a rôle from his repertory. But he refused to obey me. First he jumped into my lap and began to kiss me, then he sprang down again and tugged at the sleeve of my coat.

"He's trying to get me to go. And he is right."

"Yes, for he wants to take you to your dead master."

The policemen who had taken Vitalis away had said they would need to question me, and that they would come again during the day when I had been warmed and restored to health. It was hard waiting for them to return, especially as the hour of their appearance was so uncertain. I was anxious to hear news of my master. Perhaps he had not been dead after all, as they had thought him to be. I was still alive, and perhaps, like me, he had been restored.

Seeing me so restless, and guessing the reason for it, my new father took me with him to the police station, where they asked me questions of every possible sort. I would not answer them at all until they had assured me

that Vitalis had gone beyond recovery, and then I told them what I knew — which was not much, after all. I said I had no parents, and that Vitalis had rented me for a sum of money that he had paid in advance to the husband of my foster mother.

“And what is to become of you now?” the inspector asked.

“We are going to care for him,” Father Acquin broke in at this point, “if you will award him to us.”

The inspector not only expressed his willingness to intrust me to the gardener’s care, but he congratulated him upon his kindly act. Then he insisted on returning to the subject of Vitalis, and there was the one thing about which I knew almost nothing.

Should I tell the inspector of what had happened after our last performance? Would it be right for me to speak of how Vitalis had sung in such a way as to arouse the admiration and astonishment of the beautiful lady? And then there were the threats of Garofoli, but perhaps I should keep silent on this subject also. Should what my master had so carefully hidden during his lifetime be revealed after his death?

It is not an easy thing for a child to conceal a thing from an inspector of police who knows his business, for these people have a way of quizzing you so you tell what you wish to hide when you don’t know what you’re saying. That’s what happened to me.

In less than five minutes the inspector had got out of me what he wanted to know.

“The only thing is to take him straight to Garofoli,”

he said to one of his assistants. "Once in the right street, the child will recognize the house. You go up with him and have it out with this fellow Garofoli."

The three of us departed on our errand: the assistant, the father, and I.

As the inspector had said, it was easy for me to pick out the house, and we climbed up to the top story. I did not see Mattia, who probably had been taken to the hospital. When he saw the policeman and recognized me, Garofoli turned white; he was certainly worried for a minute. But he soon recovered from his fright when he learned from the official's lips the reason for our coming.

"So the poor old codger is dead, is he?" he said.

"You knew him?"

"Perfectly well."

"Then tell what you can about him."

"Nothing easier. His name was not Vitalis. He was Carlo Balzani, and if you had lived in Italy thirty-five or forty years ago, that name would tell you everything you're trying to discover. At that time Carlo Balzani was the most famous singer of all Italy, and his success on our great stages was a matter of history. He sang all over the world: Naples, Rome, Milan, Venice, Florence, London, Paris. But there came one day when he lost his voice. Thereafter, as he could no longer be king of artists, he was unwilling to lessen his reputation by singing at theaters unworthy of his glory. He cast off his name of Carlo Balzani and became simple Vitalis, hiding himself from those who had known him in his triumphant days. He had to go on living somehow. He

tried several different careers and succeeded in none. He went downhill so far that at last he was driven to become a showman with a troupe of trained dogs. But in all his wretched poverty his pride never died — he could not endure to have the world learn that the genius Carlo Balzani had sunk to the depths of Vitalis. Chance made me master of his secret.”

Then that was the explanation of the mystery which had so puzzled me! Poor Carlo Balzani, dear and admirable Vitalis! If they had told me he was once king of Italy, I should have believed them.

CHAPTER XX

GARDENER

They were going to bury my master next day, and my new father promised to take me to the funeral.

But when the next day arrived, to my great despair I was unable to put a foot out of bed, for I was seized in the night with a heavy fever which began with a chill quickly followed by a flush of heat. It seemed to me that I had a fire in my chest and that I was as badly off as poor Dandiprat after he had spent the snowy night in a tree.

In reality I had a violent inflammation of the lungs; that is to say, double pneumonia, caused by the thorough chill I had undergone during the night my master perished. It was this illness that led me to appreciate the goodness of the Acquin family, and especially the devotion of Etiennette.

Although poor people are little inclined to call in doctors, I was seized in so violent and terrible a fashion that they made an exception to their rule. When the physician arrived, he did not need a long examination to discover the nature of my malady. He at once declared that I must be taken to the hospital.

As a matter of fact, that would have been the simplest and easiest way to settle the business. But the suggestion was not adopted by my father.

"As he happened to fall in front of our gate instead

of that of the hospital," he said, "it's up to us to take care of him."

Thus, to all her other occupations Etiennette added that of sick-nurse, caring for me gently and methodically, as if she had been a Sister of Mercy, and this without impatience or oversight. Lise took her place whenever she was obliged to leave me for her household duties, and often during my fever I saw the little girl sitting at the foot of my bed with her great eyes fixed on me. When I was out of my mind with delirium, I believed her to be my guardian angel, and I would talk with her as I should have done with an angel, confessing to her all my hopes and my desires. From this moment I became accustomed to regard her as an ideal being in spite of myself. In my eyes she was surrounded by a kind of halo, and I was surprised to see her sharing our life; every moment I expected to see her flying away on great white wings.

My sickness lasted a long time, with several relapses which would have discouraged any one with less patience and devotion than Etiennette. Some nights I had to be watched every minute, for my chest was so heavy that I thought I should suffocate, and then it was that Alexis and Benjamin took turns sitting up with me. Finally, I began to get well, but spring had come and the meadows were green before I could leave the house.

Then Lise, who was still too small to work much, took the place of Etiennette, and it was she who would take me strolling along the banks of the river. We would leave the house toward noon, when the sun was at its full strength, and hand in hand we would stroll slowly along,

followed by Cappy. The spring was gentle and warm that year, or at least I have a gentle and warm remembrance of it, which amounts to the same thing.

During our walks Lise of course had nothing to say, but it was amazing how little use we seemed to have for words. We seemed to understand each other so perfectly without speech that I myself soon came to be quiet for long spells at a time.

At last my strength came back to me and I could spend my hours working in the garden. I had awaited this moment with hot impatience, for I like to do unto others as they do for me, to work for them and thus, in so far as I can, return to them the kindnesses they have shown me. I had never really toiled before, since our trappings, no matter how hard they may have been, were not continuous effort that demanded the application of the will. Still, I thought I worked to good advantage, profiting by the example of those about me.

The task they gave me was in proportion to my strength. It was part of my duty to raise the glass panels each morning after the frost had passed, and to close them each evening before the frost set in. During the day I had to shade the panes with straw mats, which I placed over them to protect the plants from the rays of the sun. This work was neither difficult nor wearying, but it occupied a good deal of time, for I had several hundred panels to move twice daily, to say nothing of shading and uncovering them according to the heat of the season. . . .

Two years of work and happiness rolled past so quickly that I could scarcely note their going. My father

often took me to market with him, to the shops of the various florists among whom he divided the sale of his flowers. And thus little by little I came to know my Paris and to understand that, if it was not exactly the town of marble and gold I had imagined it, still it was far from being a city of mud and slush, as my first view of it had made me believe.

I saw the great sights of the capital, and sometimes had leisure to study them thoroughly, I wandered along the quays beside the river Seine, dawdled on the boulevards, visited the gardens of the Tuileries and the Luxembourg, and never grew tired of the magnificent boulevards which are rightly called "the Elysian fields." I stared at beautiful statues and mingled with the most interesting crowds in the world. Part of my education was the knowledge of what made up life in a large city.

Nor did my learning of men and affairs stop there. Before he had established himself as a gardener on his own responsibility, my father had worked in the nurseries of the famous Botanical Gardens, and while there he had come in contact with men of science and with the best type of students. His association with them had given him the desire to read and learn as much as he could. For several years he had spent all his savings on books and devoted all his moments of leisure to reading them. Then came his marriage and the arrival of his children, so his vacation hours grew fewer and he was forced to use all his strength to make the family living. But the blessed books had been neither lost nor sold, and they were kept together in a cupboard with a glass door.

My great desire to read books and learn from them recalled to my father that period of his life when he used to take two pennies from his dinner money every day with which to purchase his beloved volumes. For my sake he added to the stock in the cupboard others which we ran across in Paris. Our choice of them depended quite upon chance, or at least on what the titles of the books seemed to promise. But they were books, anyway. And if they caused confusion in my studies, which were without direction, any such disorder was done away with later, and they left behind them nothing but good. So true is it that all reading profits the learner.

How many happy hours Lise and I spent together, she seated before me, her eyes never leaving mine for an instant, I reading aloud to her in my best voice. Often I would come to a stop, when I met words or passages that I did not understand, and I would look at her. Then we would spend a long time hunting for the meaning of the puzzle, but if we could not hit upon it, she would make a sign to me with her hand to go ahead with my reading.

I also taught Lise to draw, or at least to do what I called drawing. This task was long and difficult, but finally we began to get somewhere. Of course, I was a pretty poor teacher. But we understood each other, and a thorough agreement between teacher and pupil is sometimes better than talent. What joy we felt when she drew a few pictures in which we could recognize what she meant to portray! Father Acquin embraced me.

"Look here!" he said with a smile. "I could have

done a lot worse than take you into the family. Lise will reward you for your kindness later on in life."

By "later" he meant when she could express herself in words, for they had not given up hope of curing her defect of speech. But the doctors had said there was nothing they could do for a while, that they must wait for a crisis of some sort to appear.

By "later" Father Acquin likewise referred to the sad gesture Lise always made when I sang her my songs. She had wanted me to teach her to play the harp, and her fingers quickly got so they could follow the motions of mine. But of course she was not able to learn to sing, and that vexed her terribly. Many times I have seen tears in her eyes when she could not hide her sorrow. But, with her sweet and gentle nature, her distress would not last long. She would wipe away the traces of her ill-temper with a resigned smile and would wave her hand as much as to say, "Later."

Adopted by Father Acquin, and treated like a brother by his children, I probably should have remained forever in this happy home had not a misfortune come from a clear sky to change again and suddenly the trend of my whole later life. For it must have been decided that as a child I should not remain happy for a long time, and that just when I thought myself best assured of calm and repose, that very moment would I once more be thrown upon the world to assume again my adventurous life — and all this by happenings outside of my power to foresee or to control.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FAMILY IS SCATTERED

There were days when, alone and in a thoughtful mood, I said to myself, "You are too happy, my boy. This will not last."

How the misfortune would come, I could not guess. But I was quite certain that, from one direction or another, it would put in an appearance. . . .

I should have said long before this that my father was one of the most clever florists anywhere near Paris. He raised clove pinks or carnations. But when the season for these flowers was over, we grew other plants, of course, for it is the first rule of gardening not to have a single spot of one's land empty at any time. As soon as one set of plants is sold in market, others must replace them.

At the moment to which I have come in my story, our season for starwort, fuchsias, and oleanders showed every sign of being a most excellent one. For long weeks we had been working almost to exhaustion in order to reach success, hardly ever taking a single hour off, even on Sundays. However, now that everything possible had been done, and the flowers were ready for the opening of the autumn season, it was decided that as a reward for our industry we should all go to Arcueil, to dine with one of Father Acquin's friends. This was on Sunday, August 5.

Cappy himself was to be one of the party. We would work until three or four o'clock, then when the day's labor was finished we would lock the gate and hurry away on our happy errand. We were to arrive at our destination at five or six o'clock, and then after dinner we would come right home again, so as not to get to bed too late. For we would have to be at our business bright and early Monday morning, fresh and in the best of tempers.

What fun!

Father turned the key in the lock of the great gate. "Come on, everybody!" he cried. "Cappy, you go on ahead!"

I took Lise by the hand and started to run with her, accompanied by the delighted barking of the dog, who was running circles around us. Perhaps he thought that we had not been traveling on the highway for a long time and had been getting bored by his long stay in a single place. Besides, I was generally too busy to pay much attention to him, and this was the thing he resented most.

We were all decked out in our Sunday best and had spared no pains in getting ourselves ready for the feast. People turned around to smile at us as we passed. I don't know what I looked like, but I can swear that Lise in her straw hat, her blue dress, and her gray suede shoes was the prettiest and gayest little girl one could wish to see.

Time passed so quickly that I took small heed of it. All I remember is that when our wonderful dinner was drawing to a close one of us noticed that the sky was filling with black clouds over in the west. And, as our

meal was being served beneath a giant elder tree out in the open air, it was easy for us to note that a storm was gathering.

"Children," said Father Acquin, "we shall certainly have to make haste and get home before the weather changes."

At this suggestion there was a general dissent: "What! So soon? Oh, we have hardly got started!"

"If the wind rises," Father said, more sharply than was his custom, "it may upset the glass frames. Get ready!"

There was no reply to make to this. We knew what the glass panes were worth to a florist — they were his whole fortune. They spell ruin if broken.

"I'll run on ahead," continued Father, "and take Benjamin and Alexis with me. We'll get there double-quick. Remi can follow more slowly with the two girls."

And without saying anything further off they rushed, while Etiennette and I came on behind more slowly, regulating our gait to the shorter steps of Lise.

We no longer felt like laughing or playing pranks.

The sky kept growing ever darker, and the storm swept rapidly toward us, preceded by clouds of dust that the rising wind swirled in great eddies around us. When caught in one of these small sandstorms, all one could do was stop, turn his back to the wind, and cover his eyes with his hands, or he would be blinded. If you breathed at such a time, your mouth had a flinty taste in it.

The thunder rumbled afar off, but its growling drew nearer every few seconds, cut across by blinding flashes

of lightning. The clouds above our heads became so thick that it was almost night.

And then a strange thing happened. In the midst of the rattling and roaring of the thunderbolts we sensed the presence of a new and terrible sound that seemed to come from no explainable source. It was as if a regiment of cavalry were trying madly to escape the pursuing fury of the elements. But the idea was absurd. What would a regiment of horse be doing in our neighborhood?

Then all at once we knew! Hail began to fall. A few stones of ice struck our faces, and then quite without warning there was an avalanche of them. We had to hurl ourselves breathlessly within the shelter of a convenient gateway.

And then we saw the most terrible downpour of hail that can be imagined. In an instant the street before us was covered by a thick white layer, as if in midwinter. The stones themselves were as large as pigeons' eggs. As they struck they made a deafening racket, in the midst of which we could at intervals hear the smashing of glass. Along with the hail, as it slipped off the roofs, all manner of objects fell: broken pieces of tile, dried mortar, slates — the last-named especially making black spots amid the whiteness of the flying hail.

"Oh, dear! What will become of the frames?" cried Etienne.

That was exactly the thought which had occurred to me. "Perhaps Father will get there in time," I said, but I had no faith in the words.

"Even then they will not have time enough to cover

the panes with the straw mats. Everything will be ruined."

"They say hail falls only in some spots," I answered.

"But we are too near the house to hope that it has escaped. If it comes down in the garden at home the way it is doing here, Father's flowers are gone. And he was counting so on the sale of them — he needs the money so badly!"

Without knowing much about the prices of things in general, I had often heard that glass panels cost fifteen francs apiece, and I knew at once what a disaster it would be in case the hail had shattered five or six hundred of them, to say nothing of the greenhouses and the plants.

I should have liked to question Etiennette, but we could scarcely hear ourselves speak, so deafening was the uproar produced by the hail. Nor did my companion seem to be in the mood for talking. She watched the downpour with a despairing look on her face, like that of a person watching his house burn down.

The tempest did not last more than five or six minutes, and it went as suddenly as it had come. The storm marched off upon Paris, and we could emerge from our sheltering gateway. In the street the hailstones rolled from under our feet like the round hard pebbles by an ocean beach, and they were spread so thickly that we were ankle-deep in them.

Lise, because of her frail suede shoes, could not walk in this ice, and so I carried her on my back. Her face, so merry but a little while before, was now grief-stricken and tearful.

We hastened home as fast as we could. The big gate leading to the gardens stood wide open, and we fairly ran through it.

What a spectacle met our eyes! Everything was broken to shivers — frames, flowers, splinters of glass, hailstones formed one heap of *débris*. Of the scene which had been that afternoon so beautiful and varied, there remained no trace. Beauty had become a cluttered, shapeless mass.

Where was our father?

We searched for him. But it was not until we had looked everywhere else in vain that we came upon him in the great conservatory, not one of whose panes had escaped destruction. He was seated, collapsed one might better say, on a wheelbarrow in the midst of the wreckage that covered the ground. Alexis and Benjamin stood near him in speechless dismay.

“O my poor children!” he cried, lifting his head at our approach, which we indicated by the crunching of glass under our feet. “O my blessed babies!”

He gathered Lise into his arms and started to sob. He said nothing. What was there to say?

It was a disaster, a complete one. But, great as it was to the eye, its consequences were even more terrible. I learned soon enough from Etienne and the boys how justified was Father’s despair.

Ten years before Father had bought the farm and built the house. The man who had sold him the land had also loaned him the money to buy the materials necessary to follow the trade of flower culture. The whole amount

was payable in annual instalments spread over a term of fifteen years. Up to the present time M. Acquin had been able to meet the notes when they fell due, but only by dint of the greatest labor and privations. It seems that the lender of the money had long been waiting for the moment when the florist would be unable to meet one of his partial payments. For then, according to the terms of the contract, the lender could take back the title to the land he had sold, besides keeping all the money that had been turned in to him previous to that time.

And this day of reckoning had come at last, thanks to the hail!

What would happen now?

We were not to be left in doubt for long. The very day after the one when the notes fell due — and M. Acquin, of course, could not pay them, as he had hoped, from the sale of his flowers — we saw a gentleman dressed in black enter the house. He took no special pains to be polite, and he handed us a stamped paper on which he filled in several words at a line left blank. He was a bailiff.

And from that day forward he called so often that he got to know the names of all of us.

“Good morning, Remi,” he would say. “Hello, Alexis. Oh, there you are, Miss Etiennette — a fine day!”

And he would hand us always a paper with an official stamp, as if he were being very friendly. Then he would smile sweetly and say, “Good-by, children!”

And I would wish him to go to the bad place!

Father did not stay at home much. He ran about in

Paris a good deal. I don't know what he was doing there, for he said nothing, although he was ordinarily so talkative. I suppose he went to see his lawyer and appeared in court.

One terrifying thought occupied my mind: Vitalis, too, had appeared in court, and I knew what the result of that had been.

A part of the winter passed without anything definite happening. As we had not been able to repair the green-houses and to have glass put in our frames, we cultivated the garden with such vegetables and flowers as required no special shelter. The result would not be anything to boast about, but at least it was better than nothing, and we might as well work as sit about in idleness.

One evening Father came home more cast down than usual.

"Children," he said, "we'll have to give up."

I was on the point of leaving the room, for I understood the seriousness of what he had to say, and I thought I ought not to listen when he was speaking to his own family. But he called me back with a gesture.

"You are one of the family, aren't you?" he asked. "And, although you are really not old enough to listen to what I have to tell you, still you have been tested by misfortune so that you may understand. Children, I shall have to leave you."

There was but one outcry — one note of grief. Lise sprang into his arms and kissed him through her tears.

"You may know that I do not leave you willingly — such good little children, and dear little Lise. But I have

been ordered by the courts to pay, and as I have no money, they are going to sell my goods at auction. As if this is not enough, they are putting me in prison for a term of five years. I cannot pay with gold, so they make me pay with my body, they take away my liberty."

At this news we started to cry in good earnest.

"Yes, it's pretty sad," he said. "But there's no going contrary to the law of the land."

There was a deep silence.

"Of course I have thought a lot about you," Father continued, "and here is what I have decided. Remi, who writes the best hand, must send a letter to my sister Catherine. He will explain the situation and ask her to come here. Catherine does not lose her head easily and will know what is best to do."

It was the first time I had ever written a letter, and it was a cruel beginning for me. But there was some hope for us in the thought that Aunt Catherine was coming, and that she was a woman who knew how to do things. Perhaps things would not be so bad, after all.

And yet she did not arrive as soon as we thought she would. And before she made her appearance the police came to take Father away.

He had been just leaving the house to visit one of his friends, when he met them coming down the street. I was with him, and we were surrounded before we were aware of what was happening. But Father would not try to escape. He grew white, as if he had suddenly been taken sick, and asked the guards to give him a last moment in which to say good-by to his children.

"Don't take it so hard, my dear fellow," one of the policemen said. "There are lots of things more terrible than going to prison for debt. You'll meet some of our best people there."

We went back into the house, and I ran to call the boys who were out in the garden. When we got back, Father was holding Lise in his arms. She was shedding hot tears. One of the guards whispered something in his ear, but I did not hear what it was.

"Yes, you are right," Father responded. "It must be."

And, getting up abruptly, he set Lise down. She clung to him and would not let go of his hand. Then M. Acquin kissed Etiennette, Alexis, and Benjamin. I was off in one corner, my eyes dim with tears. Father called to me, "Aren't you going to kiss me, Remi? Don't forget that you're one of my children, too."

He gave Lise into Etiennette's care and then left with his guards. I started toward the door to follow him, but stopped at a sign from the older sister. We stood dumfounded in the middle of the kitchen. Not one of us could think of a thing to say. And what was there to say? We all knew that the arrest had to come sooner or later. But we had thought that Aunt Catherine would be there to look after us.

She arrived about an hour after Father's departure. And she found us still huddled together in the kitchen, speechless. But she made short work of our distress.

Aunt Catherine was a strong-minded woman. She knew where to begin and what to do about it. She had the decision and will of a man. For ten years she had

been nurse in five different Paris families, and understood how to meet the difficulties of life, and, as she herself said, "wasn't born yesterday."

It was a great relief for us to hear her commanding voice and to obey it meekly. She put us back on our feet.

For a peasant woman of no education and no means, the responsibility that had fallen upon her was a heavy one. It was enough to unsettle even the bravest sort of person: a family of orphans, the eldest not yet seventeen, the youngest a dumb child.

She had been nurse in a lawyer's family, and so she went to consult this man. It was with him, on his advice and counsel, that our fate was settled. Then she went to have a talk with our father in prison, and thus, a week after her arrival, without having once confided to us her intentions or her proceedings, she told us the decisions she had reached.

As we were too young to work by ourselves, each one was to go to some uncle or aunt: Lise to be with her, Alexis to live with an uncle who was a coal-miner at Varses, Benjamin with another who was a florist at Saint-Quentin, and Etiennette with an aunt who was married and lived at the seashore.

I listened to these arrangements, waiting until my turn came. When Aunt Catherine was through with her speech, I stepped forward.

"And where am I to go?" I asked.

"You? But you are not a member of the family."

"I'll work for you, if you'll let me."

"Why, you see, you don't belong to us."

"Just ask Alexis or Benny if I can't work fine."

"And you're good at eating soup, too, I'll wager."

"Oh, he's one of us, he's in the family," all the children cried.

Lise came forward and clasped her hands before her aunt, with an imploring gesture that was more eloquent than speech.

"You poor little midget," Aunt Catherine said, "I know well enough you'd like to have him come and live with me. But, you see, in this life one doesn't get everything he wants. You are my niece, dearie, and if when we get home my man has a word to say about it, I'll settle him in just one word: 'She's my own, and who'll take pity on her, if I don't?' And the same thing will be true with your other relations. One takes in his own family, one doesn't bother about strangers, for there's none too much bread to go around, as it is."

I felt there was nothing to say in reply. For she spoke only the truth. I did not belong to the family and had no claim upon them. To ask for help would be begging. And yet, could I have loved them more if they had really been my own brothers and sisters?

Aunt Catherine did not postpone the carrying-out of her plans. She warned us that our separation would take place the following day, and thereupon she sent us off to bed.

Hardly had we gone upstairs when everyone crowded around me. Lise threw herself in my arms, crying. And then I learned that in spite of their grief in parting from one another it was of me they were thinking, it was for

me they grieved. And I felt indeed their brother. Then an idea suddenly entered my confused mind.

"Listen," I said to them, "even if your relatives don't want to take me in, you've made me a member of the family, haven't you?"

"I should say we have!" they cried in chorus, all except Lise. And she agreed to their words by squeezing my hand and looking at me so intently that the tears came to my eyes.

"Well, then! I'll prove to you I am a brother," I asserted.

"Where are you going to work?" asked Benjamin.

"There's a place open at Pernuit's. Shall I see whether I can get a job for you there, tomorrow?" asked Etiennette.

"I don't want a steady job. If I took one, I'd have to stay in Paris. I'm going to take my sheepskin coat, unhook my harp from the nail where Father hung it, and go and visit you one after the other. Sooner or later, I'll see you all, and so with my aid you will keep in touch with one another. I haven't forgotten my songs and my dance melodies — at least I'll earn my living."

From the look of contentment written in their faces, I knew my idea made possible the fulfillment of their hopes. And so in my hour of sorrow I was happy. We talked for hours of our plan, of our parting, of our coming reunion, of the past and the future. Then Etiennette sent us off to bed. But no one slept well that night, and I perhaps less so than the others.

Next day, shortly after dawn, Lise took me out to

the garden, and I well knew that she had something to say to me.

"You want to speak to me?" I said, just to encourage her.

She nodded her head vigorously.

"You are sorry we have to part. You don't have to tell me that, for I see it written in your eyes, and I feel it in my heart."

She indicated that this was not what she wished to say.

"In two weeks I shall be with you in Dreuzy."

She shook her head.

"You don't want me to come to Dreuzy at all?"

Whenever we wished to talk, I generally went ahead to ask questions, and she would signify no or yes by a shake or a nod of the head.

Thus, she told me that she wished me to visit her and Aunt Catherine. But also, by stretching her hand out toward three different points of the compass, she pointed out that she wanted me to visit her two brothers and her sister before I came to look her up.

"You wish me to take in Varses, Esnandes, and Saint-Quentin first?" I inquired.

She smiled, happy at getting her meaning to me.

"Why? I want to see you first of all."

Again with her hands, her lips, and especially her speaking eyes she told me why she made this odd request. I translate into words what she pictured to me:

"So that I get news of Etiennette, Alexis, and Benjamin, you must look in on them first. Then you can

come to Dreuzy and tell me all you've seen and what they have said."

Dear Lise!

They had to start away at eight o'clock that morning. Aunt Catherine had ordered a cab, so they could go to the railroad station by way of the prison, where they could kiss their father good-by.

At seven o'clock Etiennette in turn took me to the garden.

"I want to give you a keepsake for remembrance," she said. "Take this little housewife. You will find inside it thread, needles, and also the scissors my godfather gave me years ago. You'll have need of all those things on the road, for I shall not be handy to sew on a patch or a button. When you use it, think of me."

While Etiennette was saying this, Alexis was hovering about us. When she had gone back into the house, while I was still stirred by her thoughtfulness, he came up to me.

"Look here," he said. "I've got two five-franc pieces. It will be jolly if you'll take one of them for yours."

Alexis was the only one of the five of us who had ever cared for money, and we had joked with him because of his stinginess. He had saved it up penny by penny, and always took real pleasure in keeping his hoard with him. He would count the treasure a hundred times and hold it in his open hand so that the coins would reflect the sunlight and he could hear them chink. He liked brand-new coins particularly.

His offer touched me deeply. I started to refuse, but

he insisted, and slipped a shining coin into my hand. I knew that his affection for me must be strong, because it outweighed his love for money.

Nor did Benjamin forget me in my loneliness. He wanted to make me a present of his knife. But he demanded a penny in exchange for it, because of the proverb which says, "Knives cut friendship in two."

Time simply flew. Another quarter of an hour, another five minutes, and we should be parted. Was Lise going to remember me?

Just as we could hear the wheels of the cab approaching, she ran out of Aunt Catherine's room and beckoned me to follow her into the garden.

"Where are you, Lise?" her aunt called.

But she did not reply; she flew ahead of me light as a zephyr. She ran straight toward the big Bengal rose-bush which had not withered because it was in a sheltered corner of the garden. She quickly cut a branch from it, and then, turning to me, she divided into two parts the stalk which bore little buds about to blossom. She gave me one and kept the other.

Ah, what after all is the language of the lips when compared to that of the eyes? How cold and empty words seem when contrasted with the looks of love!

The luggage was already piled into the cab.

"Lise, come here this minute!" called her aunt.

I took my harp and whistled for Cappy. When the dog saw the instrument and my old clothes, he leaped in the air for joy. He knew at once that we were off for a tramp, and that he again could run free — a thing that

amused him much more than remaining chained to a single habitation.

The moment for farewells had come. Aunt Catherine cut them short. She made the older children get into the cab and then told me to lift Lise onto her lap. As I stood there bewildered, she pushed me gently away and slammed the carriage door.

"Kiss your father for me!" I cried. "Tell him —"

A sob strangled my words.

"On your way!" Aunt Catherine called to the driver. And the ancient vehicle departed with a sudden jerk.

Through a mist of tears I saw the head of Lise appear at the open window. She waved me a kiss. Then the cab rattled around the corner and was gone in a cloud of dust.

It was over.

Leaning on my harp, with Cappy stretched out in the sun at my feet, I stood for a long time mechanically watching the dust settle back on the pavement. A neighbor had been intrusted with the keys, to lock the house and guard it for the owner. He roused me from my fit of dejection and recalled me to the everyday world.

"Are you going to stay there all day?" he inquired.

"No, I'm off this minute."

"Where to?"

"Following where my nose leads."

At that, he was moved to pity. He reached out his hand.

"If you want to stay," he said, "I'll take care of you. I won't give you wages, for you're not strong enough to work hard. Later we might agree upon something."

I thanked him, but refused.

"Just as you say, not that I care. It was intended to help you if you needed it. Good luck to you!" And he faded into the distance.

The cab had gone. The house was locked.

I slung the strap of my harp over my shoulder. This movement which I had made so often in the days gone by attracted the attention of Cappy. He got up and kept his shining eyes fixed on my face.

"Forward march, old dog!"

He understood in a flash. He jumped into the air and barked.

I turned and looked at the home where I had lived for two years — where I had hoped to live always.

The sun was high on the horizon, the sky was clear, the weather was warm. This was very different from that icy night when I fell with exhaustion and hunger at the foot of this wall.

These two years had been only a lull in the storm of life. I must be out on the road again.

But this long rest had been helpful. It had given me strength and, what was worth far more than the health and the force I felt in my limbs, the warm affection that I felt deep down in my heart. I was no longer alone in the world. I now had an object in living: to serve and please those whom I loved and those who loved me.

A new existence was calling me. I called from out the past the memory of Vitalis. And I said, as he would have done, "Forward march!"

CHAPTER XXII

LET'S GO

The wide world was before me. I could turn my steps to any point of the compass: north, east, south, or west. My whim was master. I was a child, perhaps, but there was nobody to restrain me.

Alas! That was precisely what troubled me most.

How many children are thinking this very minute: Oh, if I could only do what I want to! If I were free and had no one to boss me! How many children look forward with impatience to that happy day when they can do just as many foolish things as they wish!

But I was saying to myself, "Oh, I would give anything in the world for some one to advise and direct me now!"

There was one terrible difference between those other youngsters and myself. If other children made mistakes, there was a hand near them to pick them up when they fell. But if I should tumble, I'd go clear to the bottom, and once there the only hand that would save me would be my own. But by that time I might be smashed and beyond saving.

Before starting out on my journey, I wished to visit the man who had been like a father to me. Just because Aunt Catherine had not taken me along with the other children to say good-by to him, that was no reason why I could not go and give him a kiss all by myself.

Without ever having been in the debtors' jail, I had heard enough talk of it in recent days to be sure of finding it.

I did not dare walk across Paris with Cappy at my heels. What should I say if the police stopped to question me? The greatest fear that all my experience had inspired in me had to do with the police — I had never forgotten Toulouse. I tied a cord to Cappy, which was offering a sad wound to the self-respect of this intelligent and well-reared dog. But it had to be. And, holding him on the leash, I set out for the Clichy prison.

There are sad things in this world, the sight of which leads us to mournful thoughts. But the ugliest and saddest of any of them is the gate to a jail. I hesitated an instant before daring to enter, for perhaps this terrible door, once closed tightly behind me, might not open again for me so readily.

It was not at all easy to get in. This was the one difficulty I had not expected! It was only after the officials saw that I would not take no for an answer that they finally admitted me. I was led at last into an empty parlor, which I was delighted to find fitted with neither gratings nor iron bars. Soon M. Acquin was led in, again to my surprise, without being weighted down with chains.

"I was expecting to see you, Remi," he said. "I scolded Catherine for not bringing you along with the other children."

I had been sad and dejected all morning. These words made the world seem much brighter.

"The children told me, my boy, that you are going to resume your old profession of wandering minstrel. I hope you haven't forgotten that you nearly starved and froze to death right in front of our door."

"My! I guess I remember that!"

"And even then you weren't alone; you had a master to guide you. It's a pretty serious business, Remi, what you are about to undertake, going off alone at your age cross-country."

"I have Cappy with me. And I'm going to teach him some new tricks. We shall earn our living all right."

On hearing his name, Cappy rose and placed a paw above his heart.

"Besides," I continued, "you will want me to bring you news of the children."

"They told me of that. But it is not of our good I am thinking when I urge you to give up your life as a wandering player, and to take a safe, if a humble, position somewhere."

"That's just it, Father. If I go back on my promise to visit the children in turn, because of the dangers you mention, then I shall be thinking of my own good, and not of yours — and of Lise's."

He looked at me again, but this time for a much longer period. Then suddenly he took my two hands in his.

"I shall not say another word," he replied. "You have a good heart, Remi, and God will guard your footsteps."

I threw myself into his arms, and we stayed thus for several silent moments. And soon the time came for us to separate.

Suddenly Father fumbled in the pocket of his vest and drew forth from it a large silver watch, which was attached to a buttonhole by a slender strip of leather.

"Here is my watch, Remi. I give it to you as a souvenir. It is not worth much, for you know, if it had been, I should have had to sell it. It no longer keeps the best of time, and now and then it needs a whack with your fist to stir its old blood. But it is the only thing I have left to give you."

With these words he pressed the watch into my palm. Then, as I was going to refuse so beautiful a present, he added sadly, "You see, I do not need to know what time it is here. Time is too long as it is. I should die if I kept track of it. Good-by, little chap! Never forget to be a good boy."

When I look back on our parting, I remember nothing but the awful feeling of dullness and dejection that overcame me when I found myself back in the outer air. I must have stayed a long while in the street before the prison without deciding which way to turn. And I might have stood there until it grew dark if my hand had not suddenly and quite by chance come into contact with a round hard object in my pocket. Instinctively and hardly knowing what I did, I ran my hand around it. It was my watch.

Sorrow, anguish, worry — these were forgotten in the moment. Child that I was, I could think of nothing but my watch. I dragged it forth to see what time it was: noon. It was a matter of no importance to me whether it was noon, or ten o'clock, or two o'clock, and

yet, somehow, I felt very happy to know it was midday. For the life of me, I couldn't have told why, but there it was! I knew that it was midday, my watch told me so. What a wonderful business! It suddenly seemed to me as if a watch were a sort of confidential advisor, from whom one might demand counsel and with whom one might have many a fine talk.

"What hour is it, my friend Watch?"

"Just twelve o'clock, my dear Remi."

"Ah, noonday! Then I must do this or that, eh?"

"Indeed you must, old fellow."

"Nice of you to remind me, I'm sure!"

"Don't mention it. That's what I'm there for!"

What with Cappy and my watch, I should now have somebody to talk to. I had been so filled with joy that I had not noticed Cappy was quite as happy as I. He was dragging at the leg of my trousers and barking excitedly. Finally his yelping became so loud that I was torn from my dream.

"What's up now, Cappy?" I demanded.

He stared at me fixedly, but I was too confused to perceive what he was after. A few seconds later he stood up on his hind legs and placed his paw against the pocket where the watch was.

He wanted to see the watch so he "could tell the distinguished audience" what time it was, as in the days when he worked for Vitalis. I showed him the timepiece. He studied it a long time, as if he was trying to recall something, then, beginning to wag his tail, he barked twelve times. He had not forgotten his "stunt." Ah, we

were going to earn money with that watch! It was a trick on which I had not counted.

It was time to start our journey. Forward!

I took one last look at the prison by whose walls poor Father was surrounded, while here I was free to wander wherever I would. And then we set boldly forth.

The thing I should find most useful in my profession would be a map of France. I knew where such things were for sale in a bookstore on one of the quays, and I decided to go and buy one.

It took me a long time to find one, at least such a map as I wanted. I hunted for one pasted on canvas, folding, and not costing more than twenty pennies, which for me was a large sum of money. Finally I came across one that was so yellow with age that the bookseller let me have it for fifteen.

And now I could leave Paris, a thing that I decided to do without delay. I could choose between two routes: the one to Fontainebleau by way of the Italian gate, or by way of the Orleans gate which led through Montrouge. As I didn't care which way I took, chance led me to choose the first one.

As I was walking along the rue Mouffetard, the name of which I read on a blue street sign, a whole world of memories swarmed back upon my mind: Garofoli, Mattia, Riccardo, the kettle whose cover was fastened by a padlock, the whip with leather thongs, and finally Vitalis, my poor good master who had died rather than hire me to the *padrone*. In fact, it seemed to me as I was passing the Church of St. Medardus that I recognized in a child

leaning against its walls little Mattia. This lad had the same overgrown head, the same limpid eyes, the same expressive mouth, the same gentle and resigned air, and the same comical figure. But, strangely enough, if it were Mattia, he had not grown an inch.

I drew near, to study the child more closely. There was no doubt of it — it was he. He knew me at once, for his white face lighted with a smile.

"You're the boy that came to Garofoli's with the old graybeard just before I went to the hospital," he said. "My, how my head ached that day!"

"And Garofoli is your master still?"

Mattia looked around him quickly before replying. Then he said in an undertone, "Garofoli is in prison. They sent him there because he killed Orlando by beating him too much."

I was happy to know Garofoli was in jail. And for the first time it occurred to me that these prisons which inspired me with such horror might have their uses after all.

"What's become of the other boys?" I asked.

"I've no idea. I wasn't there when Garofoli was arrested. When I was discharged from the hospital, Garofoli saw that it was no good to whip me because it made me sick. So he wanted to get me off his hands, and he rented me out for two years to the Gassot circus. He got his money in advance, trust him for that."

"And you're with the circus now?"

"No. They wanted a child for the dislocation trick. I stayed with old Gassot for a while, but they didn't

want me any more, so I left last Monday. My head is too big now to squeeze into the box; besides, it's awfully sensitive. Then I wandered back from Gisors, where the circus now is, to work for Garofoli again. But I couldn't find anybody, the house was shut up, and a neighbor told me what I have just said to you: Garofoli has been arrested by the police. So here I am just waiting round, not knowing where to go or what to do."

"Why don't you go back to Gisors?"

"How can I do that without money, and so weak I can hardly stand up? I haven't eaten since yesterday noon."

I was not exactly rich, but I had enough to keep a poor boy from starving to death. How I should have blessed any one who had handed me a piece of bread when I was wandering around the suburbs of Toulouse, famished as Mattia was at this very moment!

"Wait here a moment," I said to him.

And I ran to a baker's shop at the corner of the street. I was back in a moment with a loaf of bread which I offered him. He fell upon it and devoured it.

"And now," I asked, "what do you want to do?"

"I don't know."

"You'll have to get busy at something."

"I had been intending to sell my fiddle when you spoke to me. And I should have got rid of it long ago, except I can't bear to part with it. The instrument is a joy and a comfort to me. When I am discouraged, I hunt up a place where I can be alone, and I play to myself. Then I see all sorts of beautiful things up in the sky — finer than any dreams, I tell you."

"Then why don't you play for money in the streets?"

"I have, more than once, but I don't get any pennies."

I knew what it was to stand and play when nobody put his hand into his pocket. I could sympathize.

"How about yourself?" Mattia asked.

I don't know what impulse of childish bragging inspired me to say, "Oh, I am director of a company."

It really was true in a way, because I did have a troupe composed entirely of Cappy, but it was the kind of truth that bordered hard on deception.

"Oh, if you only would!" sighed Mattia.

"Would what?"

"Enroll me in your company."

Then truth returned to my lips. "But this is the only troupe I have," I said, pointing to Cappy.

"Well, what of it? Then there'll be two of us. Oh, I beg you, don't desert me. I'll do anything you say. There's nothing else left for me but starvation."

To die of hunger! This phrase went straight to my heart. For I knew what the words meant.

"Oh, I can work," Mattia continued. "First of all, I know how to play the violin, and then I can dislocate, too. I can dance with a skipping-rope, jump through hoops, sing. You just see! I'll do everything you want, I'll be your servant, I'll obey you, I won't ask for any money — if you'll only give me food — food. If I perform badly, you can whip me, that is understood. All that I ask is that you won't pound me on the head — please promise me that! For my head is so sore since Garofoli hit me on it so often."

It almost made me weep with grief to hear poor Mattia go on in this way. How could I tell him that I couldn't take him along with me? Starve to death? Why, he stood as good a chance of doing that in my company as he did all by himself.

This was what I tried to make clear to him, but he simply refused to listen.

"Not at all," he said. "When two are together, they never die for lack of food, for one helps the other. He who has something shares it with the one who hasn't, just as you did with me a few minutes ago."

This argument ended my hesitation. Since I had a little, I simply must aid him.

"Let it go at that! We're agreed," I said.

Instantly he grasped my hand and kissed it. This act touched me so that the tears rose to my eyes.

"Come along with me," I said to him, "not as a servant, but as a comrade."

I slipped the strap of my harp over my shoulder.

"Forward march, children!" I commanded.

At the end of a quarter of an hour we were out of Paris.

The warm winds of the month of March had dried the road, and we swung along the hard earth easily. The air was soft, the April sun shone hot from an unclouded blue sky.

In the fields, in the hedgerows by the highway, aloft in the great trees — everywhere one heard the singing of birds. Before us the swallows were skimming the ground in search of tiny gnats.

Beside me Mattia was jogging along, with never a word to say — he was thinking things over, no doubt. Well, for that matter, so was I. For, to tell the truth, I was none too sure just where we were going. Straight ahead for the moment. Yes, but after that?

I had promised Lise to visit her brothers and Etienne before I went to her. But I had made no arrangement as to which one of the three I should look up first. Now as I had left Paris by the southern route, it could not be Benjamin who would have the pleasure of seeing me before the others did. My choice, therefore, lay between Alexis and Etienne.

I had chosen this southern route, in the first place, because of my desire to see Mother Barberin.

How many times I had thought of writing to her to say, "I am always mindful of you and I love you with all my heart!" But, for one thing, she could not read, and, for another, my terrible fear of Barberin had kept me from doing so. What would happen if Barberin should get track of me again through such a letter, if he should again sell me to some master who was not at all like Vitalis? There was no question but that he had the legal right to do it. And I much preferred that Mother Barberin should think of me as an ungrateful child than to run the risk of coming again into the power of her husband.

But if I did not dare write to Mother Barberin, it seemed to me that, now I was foot-loose and could go where I wished, I should try to see her. And now that I had engaged Mattia "for my troupe" the affair could be

easily managed. I could remain in the background myself and send him on ahead to enter her house and get into conversation with her, on one pretext or another. If he found her alone, he could tell her the truth, return and get me, and then I could run and throw myself into the arms of the foster mother with whom I had spent my childhood days. If, on the other hand, Barberin was in the neighborhood, Mattia would ask Mother Barberin to go to a certain place where I could meet her.

It was this plan that I was turning over in my mind as we marched along. Then it suddenly struck me that I should have to look and see whether upon this route of ours we should come across towns and villages where we should have a chance to make money. For this purpose it was necessary for me to consult my map.

Luckily we were at this moment out in the open country, and we could rest nicely here upon a heap of stones without fear of being interrupted. I took my map out of the bag and spread it upon the grass.

"What do you call that thing?" Mattia asked, pointing at the map.

I explained to him the purposes of the map.

"Could you point out, for instance, the road from Paris to Gisors?" he inquired.

"Of course, quite easily." And I indicated the route.

But at first he refused to believe me, especially when he saw that with a single movement of the finger I could travel between the two towns.

"Oh! It's lots farther than that," he muttered, "for I walked it myself one day on foot."

Then I had to explain to him the best I could how distances are marked on a map. He listened, but he still seemed doubtful of my knowledge in the matter.

Then it occurred to me to show Mattia the other treasures that my bag contained, so I emptied them out on the ground.

I had three cotton shirts, three pairs of stockings, five handkerchiefs — all in first-class condition — likewise, a pair of shoes, somewhat the worse for wear. Mattia was struck dumb by this display.

“And what have you got?” I asked him.

“Me? Oh, only my fiddle and what’s on my back.”

“Well, then,” I told him, “we’ll divide our stock, as we ought to do, now we’ve become pals. You get two shirts, two pairs of stockings, and three handkerchiefs. Only, as it’s fair to divide labor as well as goods, you carry my bag one hour and I’ll drag it the next one.”

Mattia was inclined to refuse the first part of my offer. But I had already got into the way of bossing, which I must say I found very agreeable, and I forbade him to object.

I had set the housewife Etiennette gave me on top of the shirts, and likewise a small box in which I had placed Lise’s rose. Mattia was about to open the box, but I would not let him do it. I placed it back in the bag without giving him a peep at its contents.

“Please be good enough,” I said, “never to touch this box. It contains a present.”

“Suits me!” Mattia replied. “I promise to leave it alone.”

Since I had again put on my sheepskin and taken up my harp, one thing that had been bothering me a good deal was my trousers. It seemed to me an artist ought not to wear long breeches. To make a proper appearance in public, knickerbockers were the thing, with stockings laced about with colored ribbons. Long pants were all right for a florist, but now I was an artist!

When an idea takes possession of one's fancy, one might as well carry it right out with no delay. I opened Etiennette's needle case and took out the scissors.

"While I'm fixing my breeches," I said to Mattia, "you may as well let me see how well you play the violin."

"Oh, I'd like to!" he cried. And, taking up his fiddle, he began to play.

Meanwhile, I bravely stuck the point of my scissors into my trouser leg a little below the knee and started to snip the cloth.

I hesitated. Was it right, after all, to cut that fine pair of gray trousers? They matched my vest and coat so nicely, and I had been so happy when M. Acquin gave them to me. Still, I was not spoiling them by cutting them off — rather the opposite!

At first, I was so busy with my tailoring that I only half attended to Mattia's playing. But I soon ceased to work my scissors and listened hard. For Mattia was playing almost as well as I had ever heard Vitalis do.

"Who taught you to play like that?" I asked, clapping my hands.

"Nobody much, everybody a little, and myself most of all."

"But some one must have given you lessons in harmony."

"I don't know any harmony. I just imitate what I hear others play. I work until I get a thing."

"I can teach it to you."

"You know 'most everything, Remi," my chum said with a sigh.

"I have to, Mattia, for I'm the director of the company."

You can't be an artist unless you have some real pride in your own abilities. I wished to show Mattia that I, too, was a musician. I took up my harp and began my famous Neapolitan ditty. That ought to make an impression on him.

After I had finished, Mattia paid me many compliments, as one artist should another. He had great talent, I had great talent — we were worthy of each other. But, now that our moment of mutual wonder was past, we had to get up and go play for our supper and our lodging that night.

I buckled down the flap of my bag, and Mattia swung it up on his shoulders to carry.

Once more we walked the dusty road. We agreed to stop at the first village we reached and give a performance entitled "First Appearance on Any Stage of Troupe Remi."

"Teach me your ballad," Mattia said, "and we'll sing it together. I'm sure I'll catch the tune on my fiddle. It will be pretty."

Certainly it would be a hit, and the "distinguished



Mattia was playing almost as well as Remi had ever heard Vitalis play

audience" would have to have a heart made of real stone not to load us down with big copper pennies.

When we were coming into the next village, prepared to hunt for a suitable place in which to give a performance, we passed the great gate of a farm. The front yard was filled with people all dressed in their Sunday clothes, carrying bouquets tied with satin ribbons. The men wore flowers in their coat lapels, the women wore them in their corsages. It did not take much imagination to guess that here was a wedding.

It struck me that these people might be glad to have musicians play dance music for them, and I ran at once into the yard, followed by Mattia and Cappy. There, my felt hat in my hand and with a grand bow such as I had learned from Vitalis, I made my proposal to the first person who crossed my path.

This was a tall fellow, whose brick-red face was framed by a broad stiff collar that reached to his ears. He looked like a good-natured and quiet child. He made no reply to my question, but turned stiffly to the wedding guests, his frock coat of heavy broadcloth seeming to interfere with his usual ease of movement. He stuck two fingers in his mouth and gave such a shrill whistle that he scared Cappy nearly out of his wits.

"Hey, there, you people!" he shouted. "What do you say to a few strains of music? Some minstrels have arrived."

"Hurrah for them!" screamed men and women alike.

"Then take your places for the quadrille!"

And almost before you knew it the dancers had

formed squares in the middle of the yard. Their scurrying-about caused the ducks and geese to flee madly in all directions.

"Can you play for square dances?" I said under my breath to Mattia in Italian, for I was afraid he could not.

"Sure."

And he struck a few notes on his fiddle, to indicate the melody. By good luck, I knew it. We were saved.

They dragged a wagon out from the shed. Mattia and I climbed into it. Then off we started with our music. Although we had not practiced together, we did not do so badly. Of course we were playing for ears that were neither delicate nor accustomed to harmony.

"Can either of you play the cornet?" asked the big chap with the brick-red face.

"I could if I had one with me," answered Mattia.

"I'll go and get one," the man said. "The violin is pretty enough, but it's a sickly kind of thing."

Decidedly, Mattia was an addition to my company.

Soon the cornet was brought, and we began again on our quadrilles, polkas, and waltzes. We played until night before the dancers would let us stop to breathe. It was not so hard on me, but Mattia was burdened with the biggest job, and, besides, he was exhausted from his tramping and his privations. I saw him keep getting whiter, as if he were really becoming ill, yet he stuck to business like a good sport, blowing with all his might into the mouthpiece. Fortunately, I was not the only one to notice his pallor; the bride saw it, too.

"That's enough," she said; "the little lad is almost

gone. Now put your hands in your pockets for the orchestra."

"If you please," I said, springing down from the wagon, "I'll send our treasurer around with the box."

I threw my hat to Cappy, who caught it in his jaws.

They laughed and applauded when they saw the grace with which Cappy bowed whenever he had been given a contribution. But the main thing from our point of view was that they chipped in generously. As I followed him about I saw the shining pieces fall into the cap. The husband put in the last coin; it was five francs.

What a fortune! But even that was not all. They invited us to dinner in the kitchen and gave us a place to sleep in the loft. The next morning, when we left this hospitable house, we had a working capital of twenty-eight francs.

"This is all due to you, little Mattia," I said to my chum. "Alone, I never could have furnished the music."

And then I remembered what M. Acquin used to say, when I began to give lessons to Lise: "One is always rewarded for his goodness to others."

With twenty-eight francs in our trousers we felt like noblemen. So, when we arrived at Corbeil, I thought I could without imprudence invest in a few things that seemed absolutely necessary to us: first, a cornet which cost me three francs at a second-hand store, then some red ribbons to lace around our legs, and finally an old knapsack for Mattia. For it was easier to carry a small sack on one's shoulders all the time than a heavy sack at intervals.

Mattia and I were already like brothers.

"Say," he would remark with a smile, one time and another, "it's just fine to have a director like you who doesn't beat up his company."

Our prosperous condition awoke my ambitions. Just to walk into Mother Barberin's house and kiss her, that began to seem getting off pretty cheap. What if I should take her a present? Now that I was rich, I could afford something fine — but what?

I did not have to puzzle my head long. There was one gift that would make her absolutely happy, not only for the passing moment, but for all the years to come: a cow — an animal that would worthily replace the departed Roussette! What happiness for Mother Barberin and for me if I could bring this about!

Before we arrived at Chavanon, I'd buy the creature. Mattia would lead the cow by a rope right into my foster mother's yard.

"Madame," Mattia would say, "here is a cow I have brought you."

"A cow!" the dear woman would cry out, but with a sigh. "You have got the wrong place, my lad."

"Pardon me, but are you not Madame Barberin?" Mattia would inquire. "Well, it is to her that the prince (as in fairy tales) has asked me to deliver the beast."

"What prince?" the dear woman would say.

And then I would appear and run to her arms. After a good hug, we'd make some pancakes and apple fritters. And then we three would eat them. There would be none for Barberin, any more than that Shrove Tuesday when

he came back and kicked over our frying pan and wasted all our butter in his onion soup

That was a dream worth while! Only, to make it come true, I should have to buy the cow. What would one cost? I had no notion. A good deal, no doubt. And still —

I didn't need a big cow, nor a very fat one. For, first of all, the fatter the cow was, the higher her price would be. Second, the bigger the cow was, the more food it would take to keep her — and I didn't want my present to become a source of worry to Mother Barberin.

The one thing I had to do right away was to find out how much the sort of cow I wanted would cost.

Luckily, there was no great difficulty about that, for in our life along the broad highways and in the taverns we were always meeting farmers and cattle buyers. All that was necessary was to ask a simple question.

But the first time I had a chance to inquire as to the cost of cows of a drover, whose nice face had attracted me at once, he laughed right in my face. He nearly fell out of his chair with surprise, he pounded the table with his fists, then he called for the landlady.

"Say, here's a good one!" he roared. "You'll never guess what this little musician wants to know. How much does a cow cost — not a fat one, but a good milker? Do you s'pose he wants a cow who can perform tricks, too?"

And everybody around howled with laughter. But I didn't care. So I repeated the question.

"She must give good milk and not eat too much food."

"And must she be gentle enough to be led along the roads by a halter?" persisted my tormentor.

But when joking was over and he was in good humor, he began to take my request seriously and even enter into a discussion with me.

He said he had the very animal I wanted, a gentle cow that gave a large quantity of milk — thick milk, like cream — and ate hardly enough to mention. If I would produce fifty écus, the animal was mine.

When he got fairly under way talking about that cow, I had as much trouble stopping him as I had had a while before getting him started. But at last we were able to crawl off to bed, and I dreamed all night of what he had told me.

Fifty écus were one hundred and fifty francs, and I was a long way from possessing any such sum.

Could I earn it? I believed that I could, and that, if the luck of our first few days should hold, I might save up penny by penny these hundred and fifty francs. Only, it would take time. Then a new idea occurred to me:

Suppose that, instead of going right away to Chavannon, we should first swing around to Varses and visit Alexis. That would give us time enough to earn the money, and then I could see Mother Barberin on our return. If I was only patient, we could still play our fairy drama entitled "The Cow of the Prince."

Next morning I confided my plan to Mattia, and he made no objection.

"Let's go to Varses," he said. "It's funny, but I've always wanted to see a mine."

CHAPTER XXIII

A BLACK TOWN

It is a long way from where we were to Varses, a town in the midst of the Cevennes on the slope of the mountains which is inclined toward the Mediterranean Sea. As the crow flies, it was only three or four hundred miles, but the distance was twice as great for us, because of the roundabout ways necessitated by our manner of living. We had to turn aside to find towns and small cities that would bring good receipts for our performances.

It took us nearly three months to cover this seven hundred miles or more, but when we arrived in the suburbs of Varses I found to my pleasure that we had used our time to good purpose: In my leather purse I had one hundred and twenty-eight francs of savings. I needed only another twenty-two to buy the cow for Mother Barberin.

Mattia was almost as happy as I, and he was no little proud to have done his part in earning such a sum. His share in our efforts was really a considerable one, for Cappy and I, left to our own devices and minus Mattia's cornet, would never have gathered together one-half such a fortune.

There was no longer any doubt but that we would make up the missing sum on our way from Varses to Chavanon.

It was two or three o'clock in the afternoon when we came into the mining town, and a radiant sun shone from an unclouded blue sky. But the nearer we drew to the heart of Varses, the darker the day seemed to grow. Between the sky and the earth there was a thick cloud of smoke which drifted idly in ragged strips from the high chimneys. For the past hour we had been hearing a mighty rumbling, like the dull incessant pounding of the sea. This uproar was due to the ventilating fans, the tilt hammers, and the crushers connected with the mines.

I knew that Alexis' uncle was a laborer in the Truyère mine, but that was all I knew. Did he live in the town itself or on the outskirts? That must be discovered.

First I inquired where the mine itself was located, and I was directed to the left bank of the river Divonne, to a narrow valley that is cut in two by the ravine from which the mine itself is named. I can only say that if the town itself is not particularly attractive, the vale into which we descended in our search was even less so. At the office of the company we were furnished with the address of Uncle Gaspard, and we found the place without much loss of time, for it lay not far from the mine in a steep and winding lane that led down from the hill to the river.

I stopped at the proper house. A woman was leaning against the front door, gossiping with one of her neighbors who was likewise lounging in her entryway. I inquired of her for Uncle Gaspard and she replied that her husband would not be home from work before six. Then she turned to me and asked, "What do you want with him?"

"I should like to speak to Alexis," I said as politely as I could.

The woman then looked me over from head to foot. Nor did she omit to glance at Cappy.

"You are Remi, I suppose," she continued. "Alexis has spoken to us of you. Who is that other boy?"

She pointed a finger at Mattia.

"He's my chum."

This woman was the aunt of Alexis. I thought she might ask us to come in and rest, for our dust-covered legs and our faces, burned by the sun, cried aloud our fatigue. But she did nothing of the sort and simply repeated that if I returned at six o'clock I would find Alexis, who was now at work in the mine.

I had not the heart to ask for hospitality that was not offered. I thanked her for the information, and we walked back to town in search of a bakery, for we were very hungry, not having eaten since early morning except for one single roll that had been left over from our dinner of the night before. I was ashamed of my reception by Gaspard's wife, for I thought Mattia might ask me what it meant. Why had we tramped so many weary leagues for this?

It seemed as if Mattia could not help having a poor opinion of my friends, and now when I should speak to him of Lise he could no longer listen with the same sympathy as before. And I did not want him to lose his interest and his liking for Lise.

The cool fashion in which we had been received did not encourage us to return to the house, and for this

reason we went shortly before six to wait for Alexis at the entrance to the shaft.

Warned in advance from which gallery the workmen would come out, we stationed ourselves before the opening of it. A few minutes after the clock had struck six, I began to see down in the gloomy darkness of the tunnel little wavering points of light. They increased rapidly in size, and we soon made out the figures of the miners who, lamp in hand and the day's work done, were climbing back up to the outer world.

They advanced toward us slowly, with heavy tread, as if something was the matter with their knees. Later, when I had climbed the steps and the ladders that led from the lowest level, I could myself appreciate the reason for their stiffness.

Their faces were as black as those of chimney sweeps, their clothes and caps were covered with coal dust. Each man as he came out entered the lamp room and hung up his lantern on a nail.

In spite of my close attention, I did not see Alexis come out, and if he had not made a dash for me I should have let him pass without recognition. Covered with soot from head to foot, he did not look at all like the comrade who used to race about the paths of our garden, his clean shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbows, and his widely opened collar showing his white skin.

"It's Remi," he said, turning to speak to a man of forty years or so who was walking beside him. This man had an open and kindly face like that of M. Acquin, which was natural, seeing that they were brothers.

I understood that this was Uncle Gaspard.

"We have been expecting you this long time," he said pleasantly.

"It's a long, long way from Paris to Varses," I replied.

"And somebody's legs are short," he observed, with a smile.

Cappy was so happy to see Alexis again that he expressed his joy by dragging at his coat sleeve as hard as he could. Meanwhile, I explained to Uncle Gaspard that Mattia was my chum and my assistant, a fine lad that I had known for a long time, and a cornet player without an equal.

"And here is Mr. Cappy," said Uncle Gaspard. "Tomorrow is Sunday, and when you feel quite rested and up to it you can give us a performance. Alexis tells me this dog is wiser than a school teacher or an actor."

I felt as much at home with this uncle as I had a stranger to his wife.

"You boys talk together," he said, "for you must have a lot of things to say to each other. And I'll chat with this young man who plays so well on the cornet."

A whole week would not have been long enough for Alexis and me. He wanted to know about my journey, and I was anxious to hear how he was getting along in his new career. We asked so many questions that we had no time to pay attention to answers.

We kept strolling along; the other workmen on their way home passed on ahead of us. They marched in a long procession that quite filled the street, every one of

them black with the same dust that covered up the light of the sun.

When we had almost reached his home, Uncle Gaspard came up and said, "Boys, you come and have supper with us."

Never had I heard a more welcome invitation. While we had been dawdling along I had wondered whether, when we reached the door of the house, we should have to separate, the manner of the aunt's welcome not having given us much hope.

"Here's Remi and his young friend," the father called, as he entered the hallway.

"I've had the pleasure of meeting them already."

"All the better! You know each other, then. They are staying to supper with us."

We sat down at the dinner table, but it was not exactly a banquet that was spread before us. To begin with, there was no soup. The mistress of the house, like other miners' wives, spent a good share of the day in running around to her neighbors' houses and gossiping over a cup of chocolate or coffee. And then, just before her husband got back from work, she would run to the company stores and fly home again with tinned foods and delicatessen. Uncle was an easy-going individual who believed in peace at any price. He would eat the uninviting food without complaint, or at least if he did have some remark to make, it would be gently spoken. Needless to say, our supper did not last long.

It was our host who arranged for me to sleep with Alexis and provided Mattia with a nice couch of straw

in the bakehouse. But my brother and I did not sleep much that night. . . .

Everything that Alexis told me about mining excited my curiosity to the bursting point. Ever since I had reached Varses I had been strangely desirous of going down into a shaft, but when I spoke of the possibility next day to Uncle Gaspard, he answered that it was out of the question. He said that none except the laborers themselves were allowed to enter.

It would be quite another thing," he added, smiling, "if you should decide to become a miner. In that case, they'd let you down. And why shouldn't you adopt the profession? It's no worse than any other; it's especially suited to those who dislike rains and thunderstorms. Anyway, it's better than being a ballad-singer always on the move. Why not stay here with Alexis? What do you say, Remi? We could also find something for Mattia to do besides blow the cornet."

I had had no thought of remaining in Varses when I arrived there. I had other things to do than to push a cart on the second or third level of the Truyère.

So I was about to give up hope of satisfying my curiosity with regard to mining matters when, as chance would have it, I learned in all their horror the awful dangers to which underground workmen are frequently exposed.

CHAPTER XXIV

CAR BOY

The work of a miner is not at all unhealthful, apart from a few illnesses due to continued absence of daylight and pure air which impoverishes the blood. The underground workman is as well off generally as a farmer who dwells in a wholesome countryside. Besides, he has the advantage of being sheltered from rough weather, from rain, cold, and excessive heat.

His greatest dangers lie in landslips, explosions, and floodings, and also in accidents that result from the nature of his work, from his rashness, or from his own lack of skill.

On the day before the one I had set for my departure, Alexis came home injured. His hand had been badly bruised by a great block of coal which in his awkwardness he had let fall upon it. One of his fingers was half crushed, the whole hand was bloody. The company doctor came and cared for Alexis and said he would soon get well, but meanwhile he had, of course, to remain at home inactive.

When Uncle Gaspard learned that the boy was on the sick list for several days at least, he was at a desperate loss to know what to do. Who would push his car for him during the absence of his nephew? He was afraid that he would have to stop work, too, and his purse would not permit him to take such an enforced vacation.

Seeing his unhappiness, I asked him whether the work of a car boy was so difficult that it could not be easily learned.

"Of course not," he said. "All you have to do is push a basket car along a pair of rails."

"If the car was not too heavy for Alexis, I could do the thing myself," I suggested.

"Surely you could, but will you?"

"I should like to if it would be a real help."

"You're a good boy, Remi, that's all there is about it. Tomorrow you will go down with me into the mine. You will be doing me a big service, but at the same time you may be learning something that will be of value to you. If you should take a liking to the work, it would pay you much better than tramping the roads like a vagabond. There won't be any wolves to get you down in the mine."

When Mattia heard of my intention, he was all smiles.

"I'll go out and earn the rest of the money for that cow all by myself," he said.

In the three months that Mattia and I had been living together out of doors he had become a different boy from the pale and sickly child that I had found leaning against the walls of the Church of St. Medardus. Still less was he the puny shrimp that I had first come across in Garofoli's loft tending to the soup kettle and burying his painful head in his hands.

He never had his splitting headaches any longer. He was not sad and weazened. It was the attic prison that

had made him so gloomy. Sunlight and fresh air had given him back his health and his high spirits.

When we were on the road, he was always in good humor and ready to laugh at anything. He looked at the bright side of things, was amused at trifles. What should I ever have done without him?

This difference between our natures was one reason that we got along so splendidly. He was an Italian, and therefore had a careless way with him, an amiable disposition, an easy manner of accepting difficulties without anger or disgust, that was delightful. Like the people of my country, I was more inclined to struggle and resist if I found myself in a tight place.

So it was agreed that, when the next day I climbed down the shaft, Mattia was to start off and give musical and dramatic performances so as to increase our savings. And Cappy, to whom I carefully explained the whole proceeding, seemed to give it his approval.

The following morning I got into the working clothes of Alexis. I stopped but a moment to say good-by to Mattia and Cappy and to tell them to be nice children, then I followed Uncle Gaspard.

"Keep a good lookout!" he warned me as he handed me my lantern. "When you're going down the ladders, don't leave one step until you've got a good hold on another."

We walked along down the gallery, he leading the way, I following close to his heels.

"If you slip a bit on the stairs," he continued, "don't let go, but hang on like a good fellow. The bottom of

the pit is far below us and it is a good bit harder than you are."

I really did not need any of his warnings, for it was not without a certain sense of dread that I left the light of day and entered the darkness of night. It took more courage than I expected to leave the surface of the earth and descend into its depths. I looked over my shoulder instinctively, but already we had penetrated a long distance into the gallery, and the light at the end of a long tube was now no more than a white globe, like the moon in a dark and starless sky. I was ashamed of this unconscious movement of mine, which had lasted for but the flash of a second, and I hurried to catch up with my uncle.

"The staircase," he said after a moment.

We were confronted by a black pit. Down beneath us, in its bottomless depths, I could see waving points of light, larger or smaller, depending on the distance they were away from us. These were the lanterns of the miners who were descending the ladder ahead of us. The sound of their voices drifted up to us in dull murmurs, borne on the sultry air that blew in our faces. This air had an odor that I smelled for the first time: it was like a mixture of ether and gasoline.

When we reached the place where we were to work, Uncle Gaspard showed me what my duties were, and when our car was full of coal he helped me push it, in order to show me how to deliver it at the shaft and how to shunt it off on a sidetrack whenever I met other car boys coming in my direction.

He was right when he said that it was not a very difficult task to learn, and that I would learn to get along all right after a few hours of practice. Happily, I was hardened to fatigue by the life I had been leading for some years, especially by my tramp of the last few months, so I had nothing to complain of from this angle of my work. And I was indeed happy when Uncle Gaspard declared that I was a fairly good workman, and that if I should stick to my job I would become some fine day a first-class miner.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FLOODING

The next day, when I was pushing my basket car along the rails to the shaft for the third time, I heard from the side of the pit a terrible roaring. It was a frightful rumbling sound such as I had heard neither since I had been down in the mine nor at any other time in my life.

I listened, sick with fear. The uproar continued, reëchoing from every wall. What on earth had happened? Had there been an explosion, had a car fallen into the depths? Perhaps loosened embankments were plunging down the gangways.

My first impulse was to escape by way of the ladders, but during my short stay underground I had already had so much fun made of me because of my senseless fears, that a feeling of shame kept me back.

Suddenly a platoon of rats hurled itself between my legs, like a fleeing squadron of cavalry. Then I seemed to hear a strange rushing sound against the earth and the partitions of the gallery, together with the noise of rushing water. The place where I remained was perfectly dry; therefore this noise was unexplainable.

I took my lamp and lowered it to the ground to investigate.

There was water there all right! It came from the side of the shaft, up the gallery a short way. This

terrible roaring then was produced by a waterfall which was hurling itself into the pit.

Letting my car stand where it was on the rails, I ran to the stall where Uncle Gaspard was working.

"There's water in the mine!" I shrieked.

"More of your fool nonsense!" grumbled my relative.

"There's a hole under the river Divonne. Let's hurry!"

"Oh, run away and give me a rest!"

"Please listen — oh, please!"

My accent was so despairing that Uncle Gaspard balanced his upraised pick and listened. The same din was continuing, but ever louder and more threatening.

"Run for your life!" he called to me. "The mine is flooded."

Now, all the people in the mine employed in pushing the cars were boys like myself, except for one old man. In his younger days this fellow had worked as a carpenter in the Truyère, but because of an accident which crushed his fingers he had been forced to give up his trade and become a car boy. They called him the professor.

I had not run ten steps after my Uncle Gaspard before I saw this man coming down the gallery to find out what was going on.

"Water's in the mine, Professor," the uncle cried.

"The Divonne has made a hole in the top of it," I panted.

"Are you two crazy?" the old man asked.

But just at that moment he observed that the level of the water was rising rapidly in the tunnel. Within an-

other moment it had reached our knees and was making it difficult for us to stand. So, off the three of us rushed, splashing with all our might.

When we reached the ladder, the old man said, "You fellows go first. I am the oldest, and am quite at peace with my conscience and the world."

We were not in a situation to utter polite phrases. Uncle Gaspard went first, I followed, and the professor trailed along in the rear. The more than hundred feet which separated the second level from the first had never been climbed so quickly before. But before we reached the last rung of the ladder a flood of water fell upon our shoulders and extinguished the lights of our lanterns. It was a waterfall!

"Hang on tight!" Uncle Gaspard cried.

We three clung to the ladder as hard as oysters to their shells. But the laborers who were swarming up behind us were swept off. If we had had more than a dozen additional steps to climb, we also should have been thrown into the pit. For the cascade of water had turned into an avalanche.

But we were not out of danger even when we reached the first landing, for we had another hundred and fifty feet of space to clear. Water was in this gallery, too; we were without lights.

"We are lost," the professor said, in a voice that was almost calm. "Say your prayers, Remi."

But at just that instant seven or eight lanterns made their appearance and started to hurry toward us. The men with these lamps were trying to follow along the

gallery and thus gain the stairs and the ladders that were close by. But in the face of the torrent of water that had now developed around us, it was impossible to make headway. How could one stem such a tide, or even keep from being driven back by the great logs of wood it was whirling along in its mad current?

By this time they had reached us.

"We are lost!" they gasped.

"That way is closed to us, that's true," cried the professor, the only one of the crowd who seemed to have kept his courage. "Our sole hope lies in the old workings."

The old workings were a part of the mine long since abandoned, and nobody visited them except the professor when he would be looking for some curiosity or other.

"Retrace your steps," he called out, "and hand me a lantern. I'll show you the way."

Ordinarily, when he spoke, they laughed in his face or turned their backs upon him with a shrug of their shoulders. But the strongest of them now had lost that iron nerve of which miners boast. And all obeyed the voice of this old fellow at whom they would have jeered a quarter of an hour before. Every lamp was offered him.

He seized one, and hauled me along with his free hand at the head of the troop. As we were now going with the current, we covered ground very fast. I did not know where we were going, but hope had returned to me.

After following the gallery for a few moments, he halted.

"We shan't have time enough to make it," he cried, "the water is rising too fast."

And, in truth, it was gaining on us at a terrible rate. In the few seconds or the few minutes of our flight — I shall never know which — it had come up from our knees to our loins, and then from there to our chests.

"We'll have to throw ourselves into an air shaft," the professor said.

"What good will that do us?" roared one of the miners.

"The air shaft leads nowhere," growled another.

To enter an air shaft was to wall ourselves up in a blind alley, but we were in no position to choose. We had either to gain the proposed place at once and thus have several minutes of life still ahead of us, with their hope of final rescue, or we had to stick to the gallery and be swallowed up before many seconds had passed.

With the professor at our head, we plunged with desperation toward the shaft. Two of our comrades chose to remain in the gallery, and we never saw them again.

And then, suddenly, above all the dreadful din and tumult there was a deafening roar that shook the whole mine and threatened to split our ear drums.

"It's the deluge!" somebody howled.

"The end of the world!"

"God have pity on us poor sinners!"

Since we had been in the shaft, the professor had not spoken a single word, for his soul was above uttering useless whinings.

"Children," he now said calmly, "we must not wear ourselves out. If we keep on clinging like this with our hands and feet, we shall be used up. Let's get to work and scoop some places to rest out of the shale."

It was sensible advice, but difficult to follow, because no one had bothered to bring a pick with him. We all had our lamps, but not one of us had a tool.

"Let's use the hooks on our lamps," continued the professor.

Each one thereupon began to dig into the soil with his lamp hook. The task was an awkward one because the air shaft was sloping and quite slippery. But when you realize that, if you slip, death awaits you at the other end of the slide, it's wonderful what skill this knowledge lends you. In less time than one would think possible a resting place had been made.

When this was done we were able to take breath and count noses. There were seven of us: the professor, Uncle Gaspard and I the closest to him, three pickmen named Pages, Compeyrou, and Bergounhoux, and a car boy named Carrory.

The noises continued to resound in the mine with the same violence as before. Words are powerless to describe the horrible uproar. The detonations of cannon, mixed up with thunderclaps and avalanches, would not have produced more awful tumult. Bewildered with fear, mad with it, we stared into one another's eyes, hunting for explanations beyond our own minds to conceive of.

"The Day of Judgment is come."

"It's an earthquake."

"The Spirit of the mine is angry and seeks vengeance."

"A deluge of water heaped up in the old workings."

"A hole dug by the Divonne."

This last guess was mine. I stuck to my idea of a hole.

The professor had kept quiet. And now he looked at us one after the other with a shrug of the shoulders. One might think from his calm air that he was discussing the matter in full daylight while he sat beneath a shady mulberry tree and nibbled an onion.

"I don't know about the Evil Genius of the mine," he said at last, "except that there isn't any such thing."

"How about an earthquake?"

"Can't tell about that."

"Well, if you can't tell about it, why talk at all? Just keep your mouth closed."

You see, now that we were dry and the water was not mounting any higher, a sort of security had descended upon us, and nobody wanted to listen to the professor any longer. And yet, the latter insisted upon further speech.

"Look at your lamp," he said to one of the men.

"Well, it's burning, isn't it?"

"Just the way it should?"

"No, I suppose not — the flame is brighter, but short. What is that due to? Fire damp?"

"Of course not. There's no more danger of fire damp than there is of the water rising a foot higher."

"Oh, don't try to be such a know-it-all!"

"I'm not trying to be anything except sensible. We are in a bell of air, and it is this compressed air that keeps

the water from rising. The air shaft, closed at its top, is doing for us what the diving bell does for the diver. The air, driven back by the water, is collected in this gallery, and now in its turn it is resisting and forcing back the other element."

"Nonsense! Do you mean to tell me that water isn't stronger than anything it meets? Do you think, then, that we are saved?"

"I didn't say anything about that. All I know is that we shan't die by drowning. But just as the air is shut up in here and can't get out, so we are prisoners and have no way of escape. The mine must be full by now — you can't hear any more water rushing in."

"Then where is my Pierre?" cried the miner Pages, in despair.

Pierre was his son, who worked in the third level of the mine. Up to this minute, entirely occupied with thoughts of his own safety, Pages had forgotten about his son. But the words of the professor about the mine being filled with water brought him back to his senses.

"Pierre! Pierre!" he shrieked in a shrill voice.

There was no response to his cry, not even an echo. His muffled tones did not penetrate beyond the rim of our "bell."

"He'll have found an air shaft," the professor said soothingly. "One hundred and fifty men drowned like rats? That would be too horrible. God would not permit such a thing!"

But it did not sound to me as if he said this in a convincing tone of voice. . . .

For a long time we crouched there without a word.

An oppressive silence weighed upon us. It seemed as if nothing could dispel it. No sound of any sort came to us. At our feet the water was as still as death; not a ripple, not a murmur stirred it. This deathlike absence of motion or noise was more stupefying than any terrific uproar could have been. We were buried alive in a tomb. A hundred feet and more of earth covered us.

Work of any sort occupies and distracts the mind. And our enforced rest made us realize our frightful situation as nothing else could have done. Even our leader, the professor, had given himself up to brooding.

Suddenly I felt warm drops falling upon my hand. It was Carrory; he was weeping silently. At the same moment sighs struck the upper edge of our sound-proof bell. A voice was murmuring, "Pierre!" over and over again. It was Pages, thinking of his son.

The foul air was growing almost too thick to breathe. I felt a choking sensation, and my ears began to buzz. No matter what the professor might tell me now, I was sure we could never escape from our living grave. I was afraid of everything: the water, the gloom, the unearthly calm, death itself. I never was going to see my loved ones again — my new-found brothers and sisters. Who would unite them, after I was gone? Lise — Arthur and Mrs. Milligan — Mattia and Cappy — they were already dead to me, as if I had not seen them for a whole lifetime. Who could ever make dear Lise understand that I had left her world forever? And poor Mother Barberin, who had been so good to me. . . .

Suddenly, breaking the crushing silence, the voice of Uncle Gaspard sounded.

"I don't believe they're trying to rescue us," he complained. "If they were, we'd hear something, at least."

"Why do you talk that way about your comrades?" demanded the professor. "You've no right to accuse them like that. You know well enough that when there are accidents miners never abandon their fellows. Twenty, a hundred, men would rather be killed than leave their comrade without help."

"That's true," replied Uncle Gaspard. "But if they learn where we are, how can they come to our aid?"

"There are two ways, and I am sure the engineers would try both. One is to tunnel to us, the other is to drain the water."

"But at the rate of twenty feet a day, which is as fast as such drilling can be done, it would take a week to reach us!"

And, with this statement, a confused discussion began as to how the work of rescue might be carried out and how long a time would be required to complete it. Somehow the impression gained weight that we should be buried in our tomb seven or eight days.

The professor had already told us of some miners who had been entombed for twenty-four days. But that was only a story, even if it were a true one, and what confronted us was the bitterest reality. The moment I fully understood what eight days of this imprisonment underground might mean, I no longer listened to a single word of the talk about me. I was completely stunned.

How long I remained stunned, I do not know. All at once I heard Carrory say, "Listen! You can hear something in the water out there. And the sound is not continuous — it comes and goes in regular strokes."

At this a single cry arose: "The pumps are at work!"

With one voice, all together, we repeated these words. And, as if we had all been shocked by an electric current, we got to our feet.

Carrory grasped my hand and began to shake it fiercely.

"You are a good boy," he said.

"No, it's you who are a fine fellow," I cried. "For you were the first to hear the sound of the pumps."

But there was no use trying to argue him out of the belief that I was the best boy in the world. For he was as if drunk from strong drink. And were we not all intoxicated with the giddy fumes of hope?

We did not know at that happy instant that we should have to undergo long and cruel days of agony before we again heard the sound of the wind among the leaves and saw once more the warming light of the sun. We could not foresee how in our anguish we should despair of ever regaining the surface of the earth again.

. . . . If the time was long for those who were at work above ground for our deliverance, how much longer was it for us who had nothing to do but wait in idleness and wonder if they would get to us while we were still alive?

And finally, to the torments of our mind bodily ills were added. The position we were forced to maintain on

our small landing became impossibly wearisome. Carrory was the least affected by the numbness and aching heads that attacked us, but he was terribly hungry and he said so. Still, there was nothing to eat.

"Well, if we can't have food, I suppose there is nothing against our drinking," growled Compeyrou.

"All you want of it — there's water right at hand. Drink up the gallery."

Pages wanted to climb down, but the professor withheld him.

"You'll make some of the earth slip down that we've piled up at so much pains. Remi is lighter and more agile. He'll go down and pass the water up to us."

"What in?"

"Take my boot," said Carrory.

They handed me the boot and I prepared to slip carefully down to the edge of the inland lake.

"Wait a second until I give you my hand," the professor said.

"Don't worry," I called back. "If I should fall in, it won't make any difference. I can swim all right."

"You obey orders and take my hand."

Just then the professor bent forward. And, because he miscalculated his distance or because his body had grown benumbed by inaction, or perhaps because the coal gave way beneath his feet, he plunged forward, slipped on the slope of the air shaft, and disappeared head first beneath the surface of the black waters. The lamp he had been holding to light my path rolled along after him and likewise vanished. Without warning, we



A single cry arose: "The pumps are at work!"

were enveloped by the darkest gloom imaginable. There was a cry of agony from every watcher. Luckily, I had already started to climb down. I let myself slide along on my back, striking the water a second after the professor.

During my wandering life with Vitalis I had learned to swim and dive with great ease. I was as much at home in the water as on dry land. My only hesitation was caused by my not knowing what course to take in this pit of blackness.

When I let myself slip into the depths, my only thought was to keep the old man from drowning. And so I simply hurled myself into the water, like a Newfoundland dog.

Where should I look? In what direction should I strike out? What sort of dive should I take? I was asking myself these questions when I felt my shoulder seized by a groping hand, and I was dragged under. A strong kick or two brought me back to the surface; the hand had not relaxed its hold on my shoulder.

"Hang on tight, Professor, and keep your head above water," I warned him. "You are saved."

And then it occurred to me that my remark was a little previous, for I did not know in what direction to swim. I had a thought:

"Make a noise, you people!" I shouted.

"Where are you Remi?" asked my Uncle Gaspard's voice. It came from over on the left.

"Light a lamp!"

Almost at once a light flamed up. I only had to stretch out an arm to touch the border of the shaft. I

took firm hold of a piece of coal with one hand, with the other I drew up the professor.

It was none too soon, for he had swallowed a good deal of water and was almost strangled. I held his head high above the surface and he quickly came back to consciousness. The men slowly hoisted my burden up beside them. Then, when he was stowed away all safe and sound, I clambered out.

After this unfortunate incident, which had roused us out of ourselves for the time being, depression overtook our minds again, and we brooded over thoughts of death. These weighed more heavily upon my companions than they did upon me, for I was so exhausted by my heroic efforts that I soon fell asleep.

But it was anything but a comfortable or a safe place in which to drowse. The professor, observing the danger to which I was subjected, took my head in his arms. He did not clasp me tightly, but held me just firmly enough to prevent my falling, and I felt like a child on the knees of its mother. This was not only a man with a good headpiece — he had a big heart as well. If I stirred the least bit, he merely shifted the position of his benumbed arm and then again remained as still as a statue.

"Sleep, little laddie," he whispered, "and don't be afraid. I am holding you. All aboard for the Land of Dreams!"

And I confided myself to his clasp and passed off to sleep. I had no fear that he would loosen his grip on me.

Time dragged on and on and on. And with never a let-up we heard the great pumps churning the water.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RESCUE

Had we been buried two days or six? We could not tell until the moment of our deliverance had arrived. But would this hour ever come? For myself, I had strongly begun to doubt it. The remarks which my companions made at rare intervals proved they shared my disbelief.

Then came the time when we no longer spoke of rescue. The only words that rose to our lips had to do with death and desertion.

"It's all right for you to talk, Professor," said Pages. "But the pumps will never suck the water out, nor does God perhaps wish them to. Surely we are being kept here because there are in our midst those whom God desires to punish."

"That's the talk," Bergounhous agreed. "God is giving one of us a chance to confess and atone for some sin he has committed. Which one of us is the guilty one I do not know."

He threw himself upon his knees and beat his chest with his hands. For whatever reason — the fear of death, the weakness of youth, the influence of this grim tomb? — I was ready likewise to go down on my knees and make public confession.

But just then a sobbing broke out behind me. I turned around and beheld huge Compeyrou groveling on the ground.

"I am the guilty one," he cried. "God is punishing me, but I repent, I do indeed! Listen to me, for I am telling the truth. If I get out, I swear to make good my sin, but if I die, the rest of you must do it for me. A year ago Rouquette was condemned to five years in prison for having robbed Mrs. Vidal of her watch. He is innocent — I am the thief. The watch is hidden beneath my bed. Lift up the third tile to the left and you'll find it."

"Throw the thief into the water!" cried Pages and Bergounhous at the same time.

"If you've got to throw somebody in, take me," said the professor. "Leave him alone over in the corner. No one speak to him — no one pay any attention to him. That's what he deserves in the way of treatment from honest men."

After these words of the professor, which were a sort of judgment on Compeyrou, the rest of us crowded together and left an empty space between ourselves and the figure of the unfortunate man who had collapsed on the coal floor. For what seemed several hours at least, he stayed there exhausted, making no movement but repeating from time to time the phrase, "I repent — truly I do."

And then Pages and Bergounhous would snarl back at him, "It's too late for that. You're repenting only because you're afraid, you coward. It was six months ago, a year ago, that you should have thought of such things."

He gasped for breath and made no direct answer to their statements, and yet he repeated, "I repent my sin — truly I do."

He had become feverish. His whole body was shak-

ing, and in the intense stillness one could hear his teeth chattering.

"I'm thirsty," he panted, "give me the boot."

There was no water left in the boot. I rose to my feet to go and get some more, but Pages, who had seen my action, called to me to stop. And at the same instant Uncle Gaspard took hold of my arm.

"We have sworn to have nothing to do with him. He is not an honest man," he said.

For some minutes Compeyrou kept on whining that he was thirsty. Then he tottered uncertainly to his feet, to climb down and get the water for himself.

"He'll drag down the loose rubbish!" cried Pages.

"Let him go where he wants to," advised the professor.

Compeyrou had seen me descend the slope by sliding along on my back, so he tried to do likewise. But I was light, while his bulk was enormous — I was supple, he was an awkward mass. He had hardly got on his back when the coal started to give way beneath him. He was powerless to arrest his slipping body with his outspread legs, his arms clutched wildly at vacancy, and he slid into the black hole. The water splashed back to us, then closed above his head — he was seen no more.

I plunged forward, but Uncle Gaspard and the professor seized me with a relentless grip. Trembling with fright, I threw myself back from the awful brink. I was frozen with horror, half fainting.

"And now you'll see that things take a turn for the better," said Pages, kicking his heels delightedly against the wall of the air shaft.

. . . . Whole days must have passed.

The professor was the only one who could still speak with courage, but our weakness and dejection at times overcame even his high spirit. Sooner or later, starvation and feebleness and fear would crumble his firm nerve.

Drink we could, of course, to repletion, but there was not a speck of anything to eat. Our hunger became so ungovernable that we tried to gnaw rotten wood we took out of the water.

Carrory, gaunt and famished as a wolf, had cut his remaining boot into strips and was continually grinding pieces of leather between his teeth.

When I saw to what a pass famine could bring my comrades, I confess that I yielded to a new access of fear, which, added to the terror that already possessed me, made me very ill at ease. I had often heard Vitalis relate stories of men who had been shipwrecked, for he had traveled much upon the water, at least as much as by land. And there was one of these yarns which ever since hunger had begun to torment us kept returning to my mind to weigh upon it. In this tale some mariners had been cast upon a desert island where there was nothing in the way of food. So they had killed and eaten the cabin boy. I wondered, as I heard my comrades utter cries of hunger, if a similar fate was in store for me. I knew the professor and Uncle Gaspard would defend me to their last breath, but as to the rest, Pages, Bergoun-houx, and Carrory (especially Carrory with his white teeth which worried the boot) — they did not inspire me with the least confidence.

Without doubt, these fears were foolish. But in the evil pass to which we had come, it was not wise and cool reason that governed our imaginations.

A fact that increased our terrors even more was the absence of light. One by one our lamps had used up their oil. And when but two were left, the professor had decided that they should not be lighted, except under circumstances which made it absolutely necessary for us to see. So we were passing our time in the densest obscurity.

And this was not only mournful, but dangerous, as well. For, if we made the least awkward movement we might roll off into the water.

Once, when I was drowsing, I was surprised to hear the voice of the professor babbling something, as if he were dreaming out loud.

I woke up and listened.

"There are clouds," he was muttering. "Now clouds are a fine thing. There are people who do not care for them, but I do. Aha! So we are in for a blow! So much the better. I am fond of the wind, too."

Was he dreaming? I shook him by the arm, but he continued, "Give me, please, an omelet made with six eggs — no, with eight. Put in a dozen, if you will, I'll eat it when I come back."

Then Pages and Bergounhoux listened to this prattling, and they began to lose their heads because of hunger and fever. Would they become violent, fall to fighting among themselves, kill? What was there to do?

Suddenly it occurred to me to light the lamp. It had

been put beside the professor, together with the matches. I took it.

Scarcely had its wick caught the flame, when the delirious ones were silent. I took the light and went down to fill the boot with water. It seemed to me that the surface had receded quite a noticeable distance.

On my return with the water, Bergounhous suddenly demanded the lamp, so that he could write before he died to his wife and children. In his pocket he had found a piece of paper and the stump of a pencil. He set about his task clumsily.

"Here is what I wish to say: 'We, Gaspard, Pages, the professor, Carrory, and Remi, shut up in the mine, are about to die. I, Bergounhous, ask God to be a husband to my widow and a father to my orphaned children. I leave them my blessing.'"

"What do you want to say, Gaspard?"

"Gaspard gives that which he has to his nephew Alexis."

"Pages intrusts his wife and children to the good God, to the Holy Virgin, and to the company which employs him."

"And how about you, Professor?"

"I have no one dependent on me," answered the old man, sadly, "and none to weep my loss."

"It's your turn, Carrory."

"Me?" cried Carrory. "Oh, I ask that they sell my chestnuts before they get scorched."

"We have no room in our letter for such nonsense as that."

"That's not nonsense. Don't write it down, if you don't want to."

"Have you no word of love for any one — your mother?"

"She'll inherit all I have. She'll be happy."

"All right. And now for you, Remi."

"Remi gives Cappy and his harp to Mattia. He sends a kiss to Alexis and asks him to go find Lise, also to give her the dried rose he'll find in Remi's coat."

"And now we must all sign."

"I can't write my name," said Pages. "I'll make a cross."

"And now," said Bergounhous, when the paper had been signed by all of us, "I beg you will let me die in peace, without talking. Farewell, comrades."

. . . . Again, a very long time had passed, when I made up my mind to slip down the inclined plane of our air shaft again, to see what progress had been made in the lowering of the waters. I noticed that conditions were now very different from those I had observed on my previous journey. There was now a wide space between the top of the flood and the ceiling of the gallery.

Hope flamed again in my heart, and the wide stretch between water and roof gave me an idea which I could not dismiss. I hastened back to the others.

"Professor," I said, "I have a plan. I'm going to try to swim as far as the ladders. I can gain them, I feel pretty sure. Then I'll cry out as loud as I can, so as to make any of our rescuers who are near at hand hear me. Then they'll know how to get to us by the shortest way."

"I forbid you, Remi."

"But, look here, I can swim like an eel."

"Go ahead, my boy," cried Pages, "and I'll give you my watch."

"Gaspard, what do you think?" asked the professor.

"Nothing one way or the other," replied my uncle. "If he believes he can reach the ladders and has made up his mind to go, I have no right to stop him."

"Suppose he drowns."

"He is just as likely to save himself that way instead of waiting here to die."

The old man paused another moment to think things over, and then he took my hand in his and said, "You're a good boy, Remi, and have a big heart. I fear you are attempting the impossible, but this will not be the first time that a forlorn hope has succeeded. Give me a hug, lad."

I hugged him and Uncle Gaspard, too. Then, throwing off my few clothes, I slid into the water.

"You keep shouting and don't stop," I warned them before I started to swim. "Your voices will guide me."

Would the space under the roof of the gallery be wide enough in all places to let me pass without difficulty? That was the question.

After a few strokes, I found I could move freely, if I went slowly so as not to hit my head. So what I was trying was possible, at any rate! What would be the goal of my effort? Deliverance or death?

I turned my head and saw the reflection of the lamp on the black waters. It was a beacon light to me.

"Getting along all right?" shouted the professor.

"Fine!" I called back.

The sole difficulty in getting to the ladders from our air shaft was to find and keep the right direction. For I knew there was a crossing of the galleries not far from where I was. I must not be misled in the darkness, or I should be lost forever. The roof and the walls were, thus, not enough to go by — and down on the ground I had a surer guide, the rails. If I followed them, I should be certain to find my ladders.

From time to time I sank down until my feet felt the iron rails under them, and then I would reshape my direction by what they told me. So long as the rails were beneath my feet and the voices of my comrades behind me, I could not go wrong.

The voices on my one hand grew weaker, the sound of the suction pumps on the other hand became constantly more distinct. This was sure proof that I was advancing. Before long I should see the light of day, and then my companions would be saved through my efforts. This thought buoyed me up mightily.

Advancing straight along the gallery, I had but to turn a bit to the right, in order to meet the rail with one of my feet. In one of my many attempts to find it, I failed to come upon it even when I had dived down to seek for it with my hands. I went from one wall of the gallery to the other, but discovered no trace of the iron track. It was not there!

Somehow or other I had made a mistake.

I stopped a moment, helpless before my distress, not

knowing which way to turn. Was I lost in this black night, buried beneath this massive vault, immersed in these icy waters?

But suddenly the sound of voices calling informed me which way to turn. After having taken a dozen strokes back, I dove down and found the rail I sought. This, then, was the place where the other track branched off. I hunted for the turn-table, but it was not to be located. I groped for the openings which should lead to the other gallery, but to the right and left I met nothing but the wall. What in the world had become of the rails?

I had followed the track to its end; it had stopped suddenly.

And then I knew that the railroad had been snapped off, carried away by the downrush of the waters. I knew that my guide had disappeared. Under such conditions my plan of reaching the ladders had become impossible, and there was nothing for me to do but to retrace my journey.

I had already come this way, so I knew there was no danger in it. I swam rapidly, to get back to the air shaft. The voices of my friends showed me where to go.

The nearer I approached, the more it seemed to me that these voices had grown stronger and that their tones were firmer and more assured. I was soon at the opening to the shaft and yelled to announce my presence.

"Hurry along," the professor cried.

"But I didn't find the passage after all!"

"No matter if you didn't. The tunnel they are driving to us is coming right ahead. They are close enough

by now to hear our cries, and we can hear theirs. In a few minutes we shall be talking together."

I climbed quickly up to our landing and listened. Truly, the blows of the pickaxes were good and loud. The hallooming of those who were working to free us was plain enough, although still feeble.

After my first flush of joy, I noticed that I was chilled to the very marrow. But, as there were no clothes warm enough to dry me off in, they buried me up to the neck in coal dust, and Uncle Gaspard and the professor pressed up close against me. After a little, warmth began to flow into my veins.

These last hours of waiting, after we knew assistance was so close at hand, were the longest of all our captivity. Now we knew our rescuers were coming by both routes, through the tunnel and by way of the flooded gallery.

The strokes of the pickaxes grew fainter. Evidently they were expecting at any moment to make an opening into our shaft. And as we had shouted the nature of our position to them through the intervening wall, they were afraid they might cause a landslide to fall upon us and wound us, or even kill us. They might thus knock us into the water along with the loose débris.

Strange it was, but the nearer the moment of our deliverance approached, the weaker did we become. I was scarcely able to keep up. Lying in the coal dust, I trembled all over, but not with cold.

Finally there was a great noise on the waters out in the gallery. I wheeled about and beheld a strong light coming toward us through the splashing flood.

"Courage! Courage!" voices were calling to us from both sides.

For at just the same moment that workmen were streaming through the new-made opening of the tunnel into our air shaft, people were rushing in from the gallery, the engineer of the mine at their head.

He was the first to scale the slope, and he had me in his strong arms before I could say a word of greeting.

It was high time, for my strength had all oozed away. I was conscious, however, that I was being carried away, then that we had left the level gallery, and that I had been wrapped up in warm blankets. I closed my eyes, but suddenly I was conscious of a blinding flash that forced me to open them again.

It was the daylight. We were in the open air.

That very moment something white hurled itself at me. It was Cappy, who with a single bound had sprung into the arms of the engineer and was licking my face. I felt my right hand seized and realized that somebody was kissing my cheek. "Remi!" a weak voice was calling. It was Mattia.

I raised my head and looked about me. Then for the first time I saw an immense crowd of people ranged in two thick ranks, leaving a passageway in the center of their mass. The whole vast crowd was speechless and made no noise of any kind. The onlookers had been warned not to excite us with their cries. But the attitude and the looks of our audience spoke for its feelings.

In the front row I seemed to see white surplices and gilded ornaments gleaming in the sunlight. The priests

of Varses had come to the entrance of the mine to pray for our deliverance. When we appeared, they went down in the dust on their knees.

Twenty arms were outstretched to receive my body, but the engineer refused to surrender me. Proud of his success in reaching us in time, he carried me to the offices, where beds had been prepared to receive the survivors.

Two days later I was walking in the streets of the town, followed by Mattia, Alexis, and Cappy. And everybody stopped as we passed to stare at us. Some came up to me and shook my hand, while the tears shone in their eyes. But there were others who turned their heads aside. These people were dressed in mourning, and they were asking themselves bitterly why this orphan child should be saved, while their father or their son was still imprisoned down in the mine, his dead body swept to and fro on the surface of the dark waters.

CHAPTER XXVII

A LESSON IN MUSIC

I had made some friends in the mine. Such agonies endured in common draw people closely together.

Uncle Gaspard and the professor, particularly, had taken me into their hearts. And, although the engineer had not shared our imprisonment, he had become attached to me, as to the child whom one has snatched from the jaws of death. He invited me to his home, and I had to tell his daughter all that took place during our long captivity in the air shaft.

They all wanted to keep me in Varses.

"I'll find you a pickman to work for," Uncle Gaspard promised, "and then we shan't have to see you go."

"If you want a job in the office," said the engineer, "just say the magic word."

To Uncle Gaspard it seemed the most natural thing in the world for me to return to work underground. He was starting back soon, with that absence of fear typical of people who are accustomed to face danger every day in the year. But I didn't have the slightest desire to thrust my neck into the noose a second time. It was nice to have seen the workings of a mine from the inside, but I had had all of one that I needed for a long time. No more air shaft for me!

The very thought of it stifled me. I was decidedly not made for work in the bowels of the earth. Life in

the open, with the sky for my canopy — even a snow-filled sky — suited me far better. I explained this to my uncle, who was surprised, and to the professor, who was pained by my slurs on the mining profession. Carrory called me a chicken-liver, straight out.

Mattia seemed gloomy and lost in thought all during the time people were insisting I stay in Varses. I questioned him as to what was wrong, but he always answered that he was feeling all right. And it was not until I informed him we were to start on our tour in three days that he acknowledged the cause of his worry.

He fell upon my neck and embraced me.

"Then you aren't going to give me up after all!" he cried.

When he said this I gave him a good slap to teach him not to doubt me — also, just a little, to hide the sudden emotion that had caught my heart when I heard his cry of friendship.

Now it seemed that Mattia knew even better than I how to charm the "distinguished audience," as Vitalis used to say, and how to persuade said audience to go down in its pockets for shining copper coins. With nothing but his smile, his wistful eyes, his white teeth, his frank look, he inspired people with the desire to give generously. He did not beg — they liked to reward him. This fact was made evident through his having been able to collect eighteen francs on a short trip with Cappy while I was being car boy in the colliery. That was a considerable sum.

The hundred and twenty-eight francs which we had

saved already, added to the eighteen earned by Mattia, made a total of one hundred and forty-six. We needed only four more to buy the prince's cow.

I parted from Varses with sorrow, but it seemed to be my fate to part from those who had shown me affection. Therefore, forward march!

With instruments and knapsacks over our shoulders, here we were again setting forth on the highway, with Cappy joyfully rolling himself in the dust from sheer high spirits.

I confess it was not without a sentiment of satisfaction, when we had passed out of the suburbs of Varses, that I struck my shoes on the resounding highway, which gave forth a very different sound from the muddy soil of the Truyère mine. The dancing sunlight! The splendid trees!

Before our departure Mattia and I had discussed our journey at length, for I had taught him how to study the map properly. He no longer imagined distances were the same for his legs and for the finger that traced them on the map. On the trip Mattia had taken during my stay in the mine he had met a showman with a trained bear, and this fellow had called his attention to near-by watering places that at this season were full of sick people, and where much money could be earned by the right people. Mattia wanted to get hold of more cash than we now had, believing that one hundred and fifty francs might turn out to be too little for the proper cow. And the finer the cow, the more Mother Barberin would appreciate the gift, and the happier we should be.

On our road from Paris to Varses, I had begun to teach my little friend to read, and had also instructed him in the elements of music. And now I took up these interrupted lessons again.

It may be that I was not a very gifted teacher; it is also possible that Mattia was not an industrious student. At any rate, his progress in reading was slow and difficult. Sometimes, therefore, I grew vastly impatient and would pound the book with my hand, crying out that he was several sorts of a dunce.

He never got angry, but would look at me with his expressive eyes, and say with a grin, "That's true enough; my head is thick except when it is pounded with a club. Garofoli was no fool, and he discovered that fact."

How could one keep his anger when met by such a reply? I would burst out laughing and we'd go over the lesson a second time.

But when it came to music, ah, that was a different matter! From the very beginning Mattia's advancement was so rapid and astonishing that it was no time at all until he started asking me the most embarrassing questions. He often inquired about things I did not know myself, which made me feel rather ashamed.

For I took my teaching seriously, and I found it unpleasant for my pupil to inquire about matters I could not explain. It seemed as though there was a kind of trickery about it. For I had heard Vitalis say, "A good teacher is better than the best of books."

"Why do we, then, not lay aside our book?" Mattia asked one day. "And if you don't mind, I'll go and take

a lesson from a real professor. Just one lesson. And I'll see that by answering the questions I shall ask him he tells me everything I don't know."

"Why didn't you take this lesson from a real professor while you were all by yourself?"

"Because such things cost money, and I did not want to pay for my instruction out of your capital."

I had been wounded at the thought that Mattia did not consider me a good enough teacher, but my silly vanity melted before these last words of his.

"You are an awfully good fellow," I told him. "My money is your money, for you earn it just as much as I do, more than I do, often. You take as many lessons as you want, and I'll study with you."

The real master we wanted was no common village fiddler, but an artist, a great artist such as is to be had only in the more important cities. The map indicated that the biggest town we should pass through on our way to Clermont was called Mende.

So it was decided that at Mende we would go to the unusual expense of a music lesson. It was pretty late in the evening when we finally reached this place, and therefore we had to put off carrying out our plan until the following morning. Besides, we were half dead with fatigue. Mattia, however, could hardly wait to discover if Mende, which had not appeared to him by half so important a town as I had described it, really possessed a music master. So I asked the proprietress of the inn where we put up for the night if there was anywhere about a good musician who gave lessons in his art.

She made reply that our question surprised her. Had we really not heard of M. Espinassous?

"We come from a long distance away," I said in explanation of our ignorance.

"From Italy," added Mattia.

"Ah, that's the reason you do not know M. Espinassous! If, now, you had only come from Lyons or Marseilles, his fame must long ago have reached you."

At this point I was struck with fear; an artist as celebrated as this one might not be willing to give a lesson to two such wretched youngsters as we.

"Is M. Espinassous very busy?" I asked.

"Of course. Why shouldn't he be?"

"Do you think he would receive us tomorrow?"

"Surely. He'll take any one that's got money in his pocket."

We felt much reassured by these words and before we turned in for the night we talked over at much length, in spite of our weariness, all the questions we were going to ask the illustrious professor the next morning.

We rose early and made the best toilet that we could, which only means that we scrubbed ourselves very clean, for we had no other clothes than the ones that covered our backs. Mattia took his violin and I my harp, and we set out to call upon M. Espinassous. Cappy tried to accompany us, as was his custom, but we left him tied up in the inn stables, because we did not think it fitting to present ourselves in company with a dog at the studio of the famous musician of Mende.

When we arrived at the house which we had been told

was the professor's, we suspected we had been deceived, for in front of this building two copper shaving dishes were swinging, which certainly had never been used as the advertising sign of a music teacher.

While we were stopping to study the front of this house which bore all the marks of being a barber shop, a man passed by. We stopped him and asked where M. Espinassous lived.

"Right there," he answered, pointing to the window at which we were looking.

After all, was it not reasonable that a professor of music should live with a barber?

We entered. The shop was divided into two equal parts. In the room at the right, there were brushes, combs, jars of pomade, and cakes of soap arranged neatly on shelves. In the compartment to the left, on a bench and leaning against the wall were many musical instruments: violins, cornets, and trombones.

"We are seeking M. Espinassous," stated Mattia.

A little man, lively and frisking about like a bird, who was engaged in shaving a peasant stretched out in a chair, responded in a baritone voice, "That is my name, young sir."

I shot a glance at Mattia to tell him that a barber-musician was not the sort of man we needed to give us a lesson, and that consulting such a person would be like throwing money out of the window. But, instead of taking my hint and obeying it, Mattia sat down upon a chair and inquired in a calm manner, "Would you cut my hair for me after you have finished with that gentleman?"

"Certainly, young man. And shave you, into the bargain, if you insist upon it."

"Thanks," Mattia grinned, "I won't take the shave today. Next time I happen along, perhaps."

I was taken aback by Mattia's talk. He gave me a quiet wink to beg me not to get angry before I knew what was up.

When Espinassous had finished with his peasant, which was in a moment, he placed his towel over his arm and stood ready to cut the locks of my friend.

"Monsieur," Mattia said, while the barber tucked the towel around his neck, "my comrade and I are having a discussion, and as we hear on all sides that you are a celebrated musician we thought you might be good enough to give us your advice on the points that are worrying us."

"Let's hear what is on your mind, my good lads."

That minute I understood what Mattia was trying to do. First, he wished to make sure that this combined hairdresser and professor was capable of answering his questions. Second, if the replies were satisfactory, he was getting a music lesson for the price of a haircut. Decidedly he was a rascal, Mattia!

All the while he was in the barber's chair Mattia was sending out an inexhaustible flood of questions. And no matter what was asked of him, the hairdresser replied with ease and accuracy. But after he had been pumped dry, he began on his side to interrogate his young customer, and before long he discovered the real reason we had hunted him up. Then he laughed until the tears came into his eyes, and I thought he would weep.

"You are a couple of nice little rascals!" he exploded.

Then he wanted Mattia, whom he seemed to find even funnier than he did me, to play him a piece on his fiddle. My friend gladly took his instrument and played him a fine waltz.

"And you say you don't know one note from another!" the barber cried. He clapped his hands and talked to Mattia as if he had known him all his life.

When my comrade had ended his piece on the violin, he walked into the next compartment and came back with a clarinet and a cornet in his hands. And Mattia played him a lively tune on each of them.

"Why, the beggar's a marvel, a genius!" Espinassous cried aloud. "If you'll stay with me, young chap, I'll make a great player out of you — do you hear me? — a really wonderful musician! Mornings you will learn to shave my customers, and all the rest of the day I'll teach you music. And don't you believe I'm not a most capable teacher, just because I happen to be a hairdresser! One has to live, eat, drink, and sleep — and shaving's as good a way to earn a living as the next trade."

When I heard the end of this proposal, I looked hard at Mattia. Was I destined to lose him, as one after the other I had lost all my other comrades and friends? My heart beat fast. I must be careful not to stand in the way of his advancement, just out of sentiment.

"Just think of what you want for yourself, Mattia," I said in a choking voice.

But the youngster came quickly over to me and grabbed my hand.

"Leave Remi? Well, I guess not! Thank you all the same, M. Espinassous."

Then the barber went on insisting. He said that when Mattia had finished the first part of his training, he would somehow find means to send him to Toulouse, and afterward to the Conservatory in Paris. But to all this pleading Mattia had but one reply, "You can't get me to leave Remi."

"Well, then, have it all your own way!" Espinassous sighed. "I'll give you a book that will teach you everything you don't know."

And he began to hunt around in a drawer. After quite a while he produced a work entitled *The Theory of Music*. It was very old, had seen hard usage, and was half worn out, but what did that matter? Taking a pen, he wrote on the inside cover of the book, "To a child who, when he becomes an artist, will not forget the hairdresser of Mende."

I don't know whether the town of Mende had other professors of music besides the barber, Espinassous, but he is the one we knew, and neither of us ever forgot him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PRINCE'S COW

I had been fond enough of Mattia when we arrived at Mende, but by the time we had left that town I liked him even better. Is there in the whole world anything better and sweeter than the knowledge that we are beloved by those we care for?

I could not tell my friend before Espinassous the feelings that were called forth in me by his cry of, "Leave Remi? Well, I guess not!" But when we were out of town I took his hand and shook it.

"You know?" I said. "It's stick together until we die."

He smiled at me and studied my face with his big eyes.

"Oh, pshaw!" he answered. "I've known that right along."

When we came to the watering places which were the goals of our expedition, we found to our joy that the instructions of the man with the trained bear were true. Everywhere, but especially in Bourboule and Mont Dore, we took in big receipts for our performances. The result of our campaign was nothing less than marvelous: after we had paid all our expenses, we had in just a week or so earned sixty-eight francs. This sum, added to the hundred and forty-six already in our possession, gave us a working capital of two hundred and fourteen francs.

Surely the time had come for us to steer directly to Ussel, where we had been told an important cattle fair was going to be held. A fair was the very thing we were looking for. At last we were going to buy the famous cow of which we had talked so much, and for which we had saved our every penny.

Up to this moment we had been forced to content ourselves with the fun of just dreaming about the animal, and with making her as beautiful as our fancy could paint her. Mattia had become as crazy about this cow as ever I had. It was his wish that she be a white animal, but I voted for a brown beast, in memory of poor departed Roussette. On one thing we were agreed: she must be gentle and able to provide plenty of milk.

But now that the time for dreams was gone and the moment for action was at hand, neither of us knew how to tell whether a cow was good or not.

What made the situation even worse was the stories we had heard told in the taverns ever since we had conceived the brilliant idea of buying a cow. Whoever spoke of a dealer in horses or cows spoke at the same time of a trickster and a cheat. Many of these yarns had remained in our memory and frightened us. We heard of one farmer who bought at the fair a cow with the longest tail you could imagine. It could knock the flies right off its nose with the end of its brush, and this, as everyone knows, is a great advantage. The farmer returned triumphantly home with the animal, for he had bought her very cheap. Next day, when he went out to look at her, she had no tail at all. What had been dangling so

nobly behind her the previous evening was a false switch pasted onto a stump. Another man we heard of had purchased a cow with imitation horns. A third man, when he went out to milk his newly bought cow, found that she had been artificially swelled up — as a matter of fact, she yielded only two glasses of milk every twenty-four hours.

Mattia was not afraid of the false-tail trick. He said he would hang onto the tail of every cow we had under consideration, and he would jerk it so hard that, if it was pasted on, the false switch would be torn off. Now that would work all right in case the tail was false, but if it were real, he would be sure to get a kick in the stomach or the head that would put him out of business. When I told Mattia this, he cooled off a little.

At Ussel I felt, somehow, as if I had got back into my own country. For here it was that Vitalis had first presented me in a public performance. And here he had bought me my first pair of shoes with 'nails and thus made me very happy.

Of the six who had formed Vitalis' troupe only two were left: Cappy and I. This thought filled me with melancholy as we were entering the town. And yet, in spite of myself, I could not but imagine that I was going to see the felt hat of my dear master at the corner of every street, and that again I should listen to his voice saying, "Forward march, children!"

After having deposited our sacks and our instruments in the inn where I had lodged with Vitalis, we set out to hunt for a veterinary surgeon. We found one without

much trouble, but when he learned that we wanted him to pick out a cow for us, he burst out laughing.

"And what the deuce do you little shavers want of a cow?" he demanded.

In a few words I told him the reason for our purchase.

"You're good little boys," he said. "I'll go to the cattle market with you tomorrow, and I promise not to choose an animal that has an artificial tail stuck onto her."

"And one whose horns are real and who has not been blown up with air?" inquired Mattia.

"I'll agree to that, too. But are you able to pay the price demanded?"

Without a word, I showed him the handkerchief in which we kept our treasure.

"And how much shall we owe you for your kindness?" I asked.

"Not a penny. Do you think I want to get rich by taking money from such nice children as you are?"

The town of Ussel, so quiet during the evening, was full of bustle and noise the moment it was day. Next morning before dawn we heard an incessant rumble of carts on the pavement, mingled with the neighing of horses, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, and the shouts of the farmers arriving at the fair.

When we came down from our room, the court of our inn was crowded with carts all jammed in together. Farmers, all dressed in their Sunday clothes, were helping their women down from the wagons. In the street outside

a constant stream of life was on its way to the market grounds. Long before six o'clock we had passed in review the cows already at the fair and had picked out our favorites.

What noble animals they were! There they were of all colors and every shape: some fat, some thin, and some trailed by their calves. Surrounding us in the inclosure there were whinnying horses, mares licking their young foals, fat swine digging troughs in the ground, suckling pigs squealing as if they were being roasted alive, sheep, chickens, and geese. But what did we care for these? We had eyes only for cows, which underwent our examination blinking their eyes and placidly chewing their cud.

After half an hour devoted to examining them, we had found seventeen that were suitable to our purpose, this one for a certain quality she possessed, that one for some other reason, three because they were red brown, two because they were white. All this caused a great deal of discussion between Mattia and me. At seven o'clock the veterinary appeared. We showed him our pick.

"Here's one that ought to be a winner," Mattia told him, pointing out a cow with white markings.

"There's the one for my money," I said, indicating a red one.

But the veterinary closed the argument by passing them both by and walking up to a third one. She was a small cow with slender legs, a red coat, with brown ears and cheeks, eyes fringed with black, and a white circle around her snout.

"That's the one just suited to your needs," said our friend.

A wretched-looking peasant was holding her by the tether rope. The veterinary asked the price of the cow.

"Three hundred francs," was the answer.

Heavens! This was no place for us! This little animal had won our hearts, but three hundred francs! I signaled to our friend that we must pass on to another. But for some reason or other he decided to persevere.

Then he started to drive a bargain. My, but that was a long quarrel between him and the farmer! The veterinary offered one hundred and fifty francs, the farmer came down ten from his first price. We went up to a hundred and seventy, the owner took off another ten.

But when they both stuck at this point, things took a turn that made us more hopeful. Instead of dickering further, the veterinary began to examine the animal in detail. And he found that her legs were too weak, her neck too short, her horns too long, her lungs were not well developed, her udders were not such that they promised a goodly supply of milk.

The farmer replied that, since we understood each other so well and he felt sure the cow would be in good hands, he would sell her for two hundred and fifty francs.

At that moment Mattia and I grew frightened. Judging by what our friend had said, there were a lot of things wrong with this cow.

"Let's go and look at the others," I whispered to the veterinary. Overhearing this, the peasant made a heroic effort and knocked off another ten francs.

Finally, what with one thing and another, he came down to two hundred and ten francs, but there he stuck.

By nudging us secretly with his elbow the veterinary had made us realize that we must not take what he said about the cow's blemishes too seriously — that, far from being a bad bargain, she was an excellent beast. Still, two hundred and ten francs all in one lump was a staggering sum for us to pay.

All the time we had been dickering Mattia was stealing behind the cow and, summoning up his courage, he pulled a long hair out of her tail. The animal had given him a prompt kick for his pains.

This decided me.

"Sold to me for two hundred ten," I said, thinking the affair over with. And I reached out my hand for the tether rope. But the peasant wouldn't hand it over.

"How about the pin money for my missus?" he asked.

A new argument started, at the end of which we had agreed to a franc for the wife's spending money.

Again I thrust out my hand. The peasant took it and shook it in most hearty fashion. He said that, just because I was a friend of the family, I must not forget to buy wine for his little girl.

Wine for the daughter cost me another franc.

For the third time I tried to gain possession of the rope. But my farmer friend prevented me.

"Did you bring a bridle with you?" he asked. "I have sold you my cow, but not her head stall."

However, seeing we were such comrades, he would not be hard on me and let me have the bridle for a franc

and a half — and that was dirt cheap. Of course, I had to have a halter to lead the cow with, so I handed over the thirty pennies extra. Altogether, I counted out two hundred and thirteen francs, figuring that this left me with one single franc.

"But where on earth is your rope?" the farmer asked. "I sold you the halter, but not the tether."

The rope cost me twenty pennies — absolutely the last stiver that we had in the handkerchief.

When these moneys were all paid, the cow was delivered to us, together with bridle and rope. We had our cow, but we didn't have a farthing to feed her or to feed ourselves.

"Let's get to work," suggested Mattia, after we had thanked the veterinary for his kindness and bidden him good-by. "The restaurants are full of people. We can divide up, and in that way visit all the public places in town. We ought to have good pickings by tonight."

And after leading our cow to the stable of our inn, where we tied her fast with several knots, we went about our business in such good earnest that by nighttime Mattia had brought back four francs fifty and I had earned three.

With seven francs and fifty centimes we felt rich. But the joy we took in our earnings was as nothing compared to the delight of having spent two hundred and fourteen.

We persuaded the kitchen maid to milk our cow for us, and we dined off the milk. Never had any tasted half so good before. Mattia declared it was sweetened and

flavored with orange flower, like that he had had to drink in the hospital, only nicer.

And our enthusiasm was such that we went to the barn to give the animal a kiss on her black muzzle. Apparently she understood the meaning of our caress, for she licked our faces with her coarse tongue.

"Oh, look!" cried the happy Mattia. "She knows how to kiss as well as we do."

To realize the happiness we felt in fondling our cow and in being shown affection in return, it must be recalled that neither Mattia nor I had ever been coddled by any one. Our fate had not been that of petted children who have to ward off the kisses of their mothers.

The next morning we got out of bed with the sun and without wasting a moment set off for Chavanon.

How grateful to Mattia I was for the splendid aid he had given me in amassing the great sum of two hundred and fourteen francs! I surrendered to him the privilege of leading the cow, and he was excessively proud to drag her along by the rope, while I marched at her heels. Not until we had left the town behind did I take my place at Mattia's side, to chat with him as usual, and especially to get an occasional look at the cow's face. This struck me as being the most beautiful I had ever seen.

And indeed she did make a fine appearance, swaying from side to side as she walked along, and conducting herself like a beast that is conscious of its own worth.

It was my intention not to tire our cow and thus arrive in Chavanon late in the day. So I decided to spend the night in the village where I had slept at the end of my

very first day with Vitalis. It was here that Cappy had crawled up beside me in my bed of straw and had placed his paw in my hand as a sign that he was my good friend and sympathized with my homesickness.

About ten o'clock, long before we reached our destination, we came upon a spot where the grass was green and thick, so we threw off our sacks and drove our cow into the ditch to find pasture.

At first I had meant to keep hold of her rope, but she seemed so tranquil and so much wrapped up in her grazing that after a while I wound the tether around her horns and sat down near her to eat my early lunch.

Naturally, we had finished our meal long before she had. So, after having admired her for a goodly while and not knowing what else to do, we began to play marbles. When we had ended our game, there was the cow still eating as if she would never stop. When I approached, she fell to chewing the grass with great sweeps of her tongue, as if to say she had not got half enough.

"Let's wait a while," suggested Mattia.

"Don't you know a cow can eat without a pause all day long?"

"What of it? We're not in any tearing hurry."

While we were awaiting her pleasure, we gathered up our knapsacks and instruments.

"Suppose I play her a little tune on the cornet," said Mattia, who always found it hard to do nothing. "We used to have a cow in the Gassot circus, and she just loved music." And, without waiting for a reply, he began to play a quickstep march.

At the very first notes, our animal raised her head. Then, without warning and before I could reach the rope on her horns, she had started off at a lively gallop.

Off we raced after her, running at top speed, and calling to her to stop. I sicked Cappy on her, but the poor dog did not have every kind of talent. A shepherd dog or a collie would have jumped at the cow's nose, but Cappy had his own notions of how a beast should be tackled, so he snapped at her legs. Whatever else this maneuver may have accomplished, it certainly made the scared animal run faster than ever.

While I was flying over the ground I yelled at Mattia, "You idiot!" And without pausing for breath he answered, "Go ahead and beat me — I deserve it."

We had stopped to eat about a mile from a large village, and toward it our cow cantered. She got there long before we did, and as the road was straight, we could see people barring her way, trying to head her off.

Then we slackened our gait somewhat, for we knew we should not lose our cow. We should only need to reclaim her from the good people who had caught her, and they would hand her over. By the time that we had reached the spot, the number of people about the runaway had increased; there were some twenty men, women, and children there, all talking at once.

I had firmly expected they would give me the cow without question. But, instead of this, they crowded around us and asked one thing after another: Where were we from? Where had we got this cow?

Our answers were simple and straightforward, but

the people were not convinced. Two or three present raised their voices, swore we must have stolen the cow that had escaped from us, and said we should be put in jail to wait until the whole matter was cleared up.

The terrible fear I always felt when I heard the word "jail" mentioned overcame me, and we were lost. I turned pale, stuttered, and because I was still panting from my hard run I was unable to defend myself.

At this turn of events, a policeman appeared. In a few words the villagers told him what was up, and as he could not make head or tail of the business he declared he would put the cow into the town pound and place us in jail. Later we should see what we should see.

The whole village joined the procession that went to the town hall. They pushed us and knocked us about, they insulted us and sneered. If it had not been for the protection of the policeman, I verily believe they would have stoned us to death, as if we had been the wickedest criminals or murderers. And all this in spite of the fact that we had committed no fault. But that is often the way crowds act.

When we reached the jail, I had a flash of hope. The man in charge of the town hall, who was also jailer and village marshal, at first refused to take us in. I said to myself, "What a nice man that is!" But the policeman insisted, and the jailer gave in. Passing ahead of us, he opened with his key a gate which was fastened on the outside by a big lock and two bolts. Then I saw why it was he had made such a fuss about receiving us — he had set out a large store of onions to dry in this prison,

spreading them out on the floor. We were searched. They took away our money, our knives, and our matches. In the meanwhile the jailer had swept his onions all together in a heap in one corner of the cell. Then they slammed the iron door upon us with a clanking sound that was positively tragic.

We were in prison. For how long?

As I was asking myself this question, Mattia came up and stood before me, lowering his head.

"Beat me up," he said. "Whack me on the head. You can't hit hard enough to suit me."

"You were a fool," I acknowledged, "but no bigger one than I."

"I'd be happier if you'd thump me. I shouldn't feel so bad if you did. Our poor cow! Our princely cow!"

And he fell to weeping. Then it was up to me to console him and explain that our position wasn't serious after all. We had not done anything wrong, and it wouldn't be hard to prove we had bought the cow honestly. The good veterinary of Ussel would testify in our favor.

"But suppose they accuse us of stealing the money to pay for our cow, how can we prove we earned it?"

Yes, that was a ticklish question.

"And who's going to feed the cow and milk her?"

Several hours passed and we kept talking about what might happen. The later it grew, the sadder we became. I tried half-heartedly to comfort Mattia by telling him they would come and examine us the following morning.

"Well, what are we going to tell them?" he asked.

"The truth, of course."

"Then they will hand you back to Barberin. Or, if Mother Barberin is alone at home, they may go to find out whether we are telling the truth. Then it's all up with our surprise."

It seemed ages before our door was finally opened with a terrible clanking of iron, and we saw an old gentleman enter. His hair was white, but he had a frank and open way with him that caused us to hope for the best.

"Come!" said the jailer. "Get up, you rascals, and answer whatever his honor the judge may ask you."

"That's all right, thanks," the magistrate said to the keeper, signing to him to leave the cell. "I'll examine this lad a bit" — he pointed his finger at me — "while you lead the other one aside and take charge of him. I'll question him later."

I thought it best under these circumstances to warn Mattia how he should reply when it came his turn.

"Like myself, M. the magistrate," I said, "my friend will tell you nothing but the truth."

"That's good," the judge interrupted me quickly, as if he wished to shut off further speech on my part.

Mattia left the cell in the custody of the warden, but not before he had an opportunity to flash me a glance indicating that he had understood my hint.

"They accuse you of having stolen a cow," began the justice of the peace, looking straight into my two eyes

I answered that we had bought the cow at the Ussel fair, and I named the veterinary who had assisted in the purchase.

"That must be verified. And what was your purpose in buying such an animal?"

"I wanted to take it to Chavanon, to give my old foster mother, as a return for her care of me and as a token of my love for her."

"What is the name of this woman?"

"Mother Barberin."

"The wife of a stonemason who was crippled some years ago by an accident in Paris?"

"Yes, your Honor."

"That also will be verified."

At this last statement I grew much embarrassed. When he noticed this, the judge asked me why I was so confused. And so I had to tell him that if he went to examine Mother Barberin, the whole object we had in view would be spoiled, for the secret would be out.

However, in spite of my worry, one thing happened that gave me real pleasure. Right in the midst of his questioning, the magistrate told me that Barberin had gone back to Paris some time before. This knowledge did me so much good that I found persuasive words to convince him that the testimony of the veterinary would be sufficient evidence that we had not stolen the cow.

"And where did you get enough money to buy it with?"

That was the question Mattia had most feared would be asked.

"We earned it."

"Where, and how?"

I explained how from Paris to Varses, and from

Varses to Mont Dore, we had painfully put it together penny by penny.

"And what were you doing in Varses?"

To answer this question I had to tell him a lot more. When the justice of the peace learned that I had been entombed in the Truyère mine, he stopped me, and asked in a softened, almost gentle, tone of voice, "Which one of you two boys is Remi?"

"I, M. the magistrate."

"What proof of that have you?"

"None, your Honor."

"Well, then, tell me how the terrible accident happened. I have read the story in the newspapers. If you are not really Remi, you cannot deceive me. Be careful, for I shall be listening to you."

The attitude of the judge encouraged me a great deal, for I could begin to see that he was not inclined to be in the least unfriendly to me.

When I had finished my story, the old gentleman looked at me for a long time with his kindly, gentle eyes. I thought he was going to set me at liberty, but nothing of the sort occurred. Without saying another word, he left me alone. Doubtless he had gone to talk with Mattia, to see whether our two stories were the same.

I remained buried in thought for quite a while. But finally the justice of the peace came back with Mattia.

"I am going to have your statements verified at Ussel," he said. "And if, as I expect, their tale confirms yours, you will be set at liberty tomorrow."

"And what about our cow?" Mattia asked.

"It will be restored to you."

"That's not what I meant," the lad persisted. "Who is going to feed her and see to the milking?"

"Don't worry about that, my boy."

Mattia felt reassured by the judge's tone.

"If they're going to milk the cow," he asked with a smile, "can't they give us some milk to drink? That would make a fine supper."

The moment the magistrate had left, I announced to Mattia the two big pieces of news which had made me forget that we were shut up in prison: Mother Barberin was alive and well; Barberin had returned to Paris.

"Then the cow of the prince will make her grand entry," Mattia cried.

And, overcome by joy, he started to dance and sing. I caught his hands, myself affected by his high spirits. Cappy, who up to that time had been crouching sadly in a corner, came to take his place between us, standing up on his hind legs. Then we performed so gay a dance that the keeper of the town hall was frightened — for the fate of his onions, probably — and rushed to see whether we were trying to break away from our confinement.

He urged us to be quiet. But he did not speak to us in the brutal way he had used when he first came in with the judge.

This led us to understand that we were not so badly off, after all, and before long we had proof that he felt kindly toward to us. For he soon returned carrying a great bowl of milk full to the brim — the gift of our cow. At the same time he brought in a big loaf of white bread

and a slice of cold veal, which he said had been sent by Monsieur the justice of the peace.

Prisoners had never been so well treated before. While I was eating the veal and drinking the milk, I revised my opinions about prisons: decidedly they were better than I had suspected.

This was also the sentiment of Mattia. "Here's a go!" he said, with a broad grin. "Dinner and lodging, and not a cent to pay!"

Only one fear in the world was left me.

"Suppose the veterinary should die suddenly," I asked, "who could then be a witness in our favor?"

"You must keep ideas like that for the time when you're feeling bad," Mattia replied. "This is really not the moment to suggest them."

CHAPTER XXIX

MOTHER BARBERIN

Our night's sleep on the floor of the cell was not bad. We had spent more uncomfortable vigils under the stars.

At eight o'clock in the morning our door opened, and we saw the magistrate, accompanied by our friend the veterinary, entering. This man who had helped us so much at the fair had made the long trip, as he wished to be present when we were given our liberty. And as to the justice of the peace, his kindness did not confine itself to the dinner he had provided for us the night before. He handed me a fine paper decorated with the official stamps.

"You boys have been fools, nothing less," he said to me with a friendly smile. "For you have set out on the highroads without any sort of passport or letters of identification. Here's one that in future you can hand to any inquisitive mayor or constable, and you will have no further trouble. Good luck to you, boys!"

And he shook hands with us. As for the veterinarian, he hugged us good and hard.

We had entered this village in the most wretched way, but we departed from it in triumph. We led our cow by the tether rope, and we held our heads high, for at every door there was a peasant standing, staring at us.

We did not linger by the wayside, for I was anxious to reach the village where I had slept my first night with

Vitalis. From that point we had but to cross a wide heath to gain the slope which leads to Chavanon. It was while we were passing through the street of this little town, and just as we were in front of the shop where Sport had once stolen the roll, that an idea struck me which I immediately confided to Mattia.

"You know that I promised you pancakes at Mother Barberin's house, but one needs butter, flour, and eggs to make pancakes."

"Um! They ought to taste good, then!"

"You'll see how fine they are — just roll them up and stick them whole into your mouth. But there may not be any butter or even flour in Mother Barberin's cupboard, for she isn't rich. Suppose we bring her the flour and the butter; she's sure to have eggs enough. If not, she can borrow them of a neighbor. Besides, we might smash them."

"That's a grand idea!"

So we bought the required articles and continued our march. I did not want to tire our cow, but somehow I was in such a hurry to get over the ground that in spite of myself I kept forcing the pace. We talked and talked, and still the way seemed strangely long to me. Finally, we reached the top of the hill where the steep declivity leads down with many windings to the village of Chavanon, passing on its way my childhood home.

A few steps farther on, and we skirted the spot where I had asked Vitalis' permission to sit down on the parapet so that I could have one last look at Mother Barberin's house before I left it, as I then thought, forever.

"Here! You take the rope," I said to Mattia.

And with one jump I was atop the parapet. Nothing had been changed down in the valley; it still had the same look as of yore. Between the two clumps of trees I could see the roof of our old house. As I gazed, a little tuft of smoke rose from the chimney. And, as there was no wind to waft it off, the yellow cloudlet mounted slowly into the air along the flank of the hill. A light breeze fluttered for a moment in the trees. The column of smoke swept slowly sideways and passed across my face; it smelled of oak-leaves.

"Mother Barberin is at home!" I cried.

Then my eyes suddenly filled with tears, and, leaping down from my parapet, I hugged Mattia. Cappy leaped at me. I clasped him in my arms and kissed his cold nose.

"Let's get down as fast as we can," I said.

As we rounded one of the turnings of the hill road, we saw somebody in a white headdress appear in the yard beneath us. It was Mother Barberin. She opened the gate, walked out onto the road, and started off in the direction of the village.

"There she goes," sighed Mattia. "And how are we going to spring our surprise now?"

"We'll have to invent a new one."

"What sort of one?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, go on and call to her!"

The temptation to hail her was great, but I resisted it. I had been planning my surprise for months, and it was not so easy to give the plan up all of a sudden.

A minute later we were before the gate of my old home, and we entered just as I had done so often years before.

Remembering well the habits of Mother Barberin, I knew that the door would be on the latch and that we could walk right into the house; but first of all we must put the cow in the stable. So I went to see what shape the barn was in, and found there as usual nothing but fagots and firewood. I called Mattia and, after we had tied our cow to the manger, we busied ourselves piling the wood in a corner. This did not take long, for Mother Barberin's supply of wood was not abundant.

"Now," I said to my comrade, "we'll go into the house. I'll place myself in the chimney corner, where she will find me when she enters. As the gate will creak when she shoves it open, you will have plenty of time to hide behind the bed with Cappy, and I'll be the only one she sees just at first. My, won't she be surprised!"

I sat down in the place where I had spent many a winter evening. As I could not cut off my long locks, I hid them beneath the collar of my coat, and I crouched down to make myself as much as possible like the Remi my foster mother would remember.

From where I sat I could see the gate. I looked around the kitchen. It actually seemed as if I had left the house only the day before, for nothing had changed, and everything was in its usual place. The paper with which a pane of glass I broke had been mended had not been replaced, although it was black with smoke and yellow with age. If I had dared leave my post, I should

have liked to examine each separate article of furniture. But I was afraid that Mother Barberin might appear and catch me unawares.

Suddenly through the window I saw her white cap.

"Quick! Hide yourself!" I cried to Mattia.

I slouched down in my chair and made myself as small as I could. The door opened. Mother Barberin appeared on the threshold.

"Who is there?" she asked.

I gazed at her without answering, and she stared back at me. Then her hands began to tremble uncontrollably.

"Dear God!" she murmured. "Can it be Remi?"

I got up and ran to her. I took her in my arms.

"Mama!" I shouted.

"My boy! It's my own little boy!"

It took some time for us to settle down, we were so excited. We had to keep wiping our eyes.

"Do you know," she said, "if you hadn't been in my thoughts just then, I'd never have recognized you? You're so changed — so big and strong."

A subdued sniffing recalled me to the fact that Mattia was hiding behind the bed. I called him and he came forth from his place of concealment.

"This is Mattia," I said, "my brother."

"Oh, then you've found your real parents?" Mother Barberin said.

"No, I only meant he's my chum. And this is Cappy, who is like another friend and brother. Come and greet your master's mother, Cappy!"

Cappy stood up on his hind legs, pressed one paw above his heart, and made a grave bow. Mother Barberin laughed so hard that she had to wipe her eyes with her apron once more.

Mattia, who had not the same excuse for forgetting that I had, now signaled me not to forget our surprise.

"If you don't mind," I said to Mother Barberin, "we'll look around the yard a bit. I'd like to see the crooked pear tree of which I have often spoken to Mattia."

"And we'll peep into your garden, too, for I have kept it just as it was, so you could find your own work still there when you came back. You know, I always believed you would come back."

"And did you enjoy the Jerusalem artichokes I planted for you in secret?"

"Oh, I might have known it was you that planted them! You always were one to surprise people."

The critical moment had come.

"And has the cowshed been changed since Roussette left? Poor thing, she didn't want to leave any more than I did!"

"Ah, no. I only use the barn to keep my fagots in."

As we by now had reached the front of the stable, Mother Barberin pushed the door open. And instantly our cow, who was hungry and doubtless thought food was being brought, started to moo.

"Why, a cow has got into the barn!" cried Mother Barberin.

Then we couldn't hold in a second longer, so Mattia and I just started to howl with laughter.

Mother Barberin looked at us astonished, but without a suspicion of the truth. So unlikely a thing as our putting a cow in her shed did not occur to her, in spite of our antics.

"It's a surprise we got up for you," I cried. "And a better one than the Jerusalem artichokes, eh?"

"Why, what do you mean?" she gasped.

"Just what I say. I did not want to come back empty-handed to the mother who had been so good to little Remi, the foundling. So, wishing to bring some useful gift, I thought it would be nice for you to have a cow to replace Roussette. And at the Ussel fair Mattia and I bought this one with money that we had earned ourselves."

"O you blessed children!" exclaimed Mother Barberin. And she kissed us both.

Then we entered the stable so she could examine the beautiful animal. At each discovery she made regarding the gift, she would utter exclamations of happiness and admiration.

"What a beautiful cow!"

Then all at once she wheeled around and stared at me.

"You must have grown awfully rich, my boy!"

"I should say we had!" said Mattia, with a smile, "for we have exactly fifty-eight pennies in our pockets."

But all this time our cow kept up an uninterrupted mooing. Without waiting to hear any more of it, I ran to the house to get the shining tin milk pail that we used to have for Roussette. I found it on its usual hook, although there had not been a cow in the barn for a long, long time.

With what delight Mother Barberin saw her pail three-quarters full of frothy milk!

"I believe she yields more than Roussette," she said.

"And awfully good milk," said Mattia. "It tastes of orange flowers."

The cow was turned out into the yard to graze, and we went inside the house, where on the kitchen table I had laid out my fine display of butter and flour when I ran in to get the milk pail. As my foster mother caught sight of these unexpected articles of food, she burst out anew in exclamations of pleased surprise. But honesty compelled me to tell her the real reason for their presence there.

"That is for us as much as for you," I said. "We are dying of hunger and are simply crazy for some of your pancakes. You will remember that we were interrupted that last Shrove Tuesday I spent with you. And you know how the butter you had borrowed for me, to make cakes with, was used to fry the onions for somebody's soup. This time, we shall not be disturbed, as I am told Barberin has gone to Paris."

"Did you know he had gone there in your interests?"

"No. But as we are not pressed for time, suppose we start the pancakes, and then you can tell me later whatever you think I'd like to hear about your husband's trip to Paris."

Mattia got the first cake right from the fire, because he was company. He burned his fingers, his lips, his tongue, and his throat — but what did that matter!

"Gee, but that's good!" he said, with his mouth full.

It was my turn to pass my plate and to get burned

The third cake was then browned to a nicety, and Mattia thrust out his hand. Then Cappy did set up a terrible yowling! He demanded his turn, like any other man, and it was only right that he should. Mattia offered him the choice morsel, to the great scandal of Mother Barberin, who, like most people who live in the country, was not very fond of animals. She did not understand why "a dog should eat Christian food."

To calm her down, I explained that Cappy was a highly trained member of our troupe, and that he had earned his fair share of the cow. And besides he was our comrade, and had to eat with us, since she had declared that she would not touch a thing until our appetite was satisfied.

When the dishes were all scraped clean, Mattia said he wanted to see how the cow was getting along outside and left me alone with Mother Barberin. First, she looked all around her, to make sure that nobody might overhear what she was about to say. Once assured that we were really alone, she lowered her voice and said, "It seems that your family is hunting for you."

"My family! Mine? Have I got a family, Mother Barberin, a foundling like me?"

"Yes. For they did not abandon you on purpose, apparently — else why should they be searching now?"

"Perhaps nobody is looking for me except Barberin, and he only wants me back so he can sell me over again."

"Remi, dear, do you think I would lend myself to such a sinful proceeding?"

"But he may be fooling you, don't you see?"

"Come, my dear," urged Mother Barberin, "be sensible and listen to what I have to say. Don't work yourself up so."

"I'll try not to, dear Mother."

"Well, then, it was a month ago next Monday that a fine gentleman came to our house. Barberin happened to be at home at the time.

"'Are you a man named Barberin?' he asked, with a foreign accent.

"'That's me,' my husband said.

"'Years ago, did you find a child in Paris on the Avenue Breteuil and take him home to rear?'

"'Yes.'

"'Where is this child just at present, pray?'

"'Is that any of your business?'

If I had doubted the sincerity of Mother Barberin, I should still have recognized in this amiable reply of her husband's the words of truth. For it was just the thing that Barberin would say.

"You know that from the bakehouse one can hear everything that is said here, and, as it was you who were being talked about, I listened as hard as I could. Then I stole nearer, so that I should miss no word of what was going on, and a branch snapped beneath my foot.

"'We are not alone, then?' the gentleman asked.

"'It's only my wife,' Barberin responded. 'If you wish, we can go outside, where we can talk more freely.'

"They walked out of doors, both of them, and it was three or four hours later that my husband came back

alone. You can imagine how curious I was to learn what had passed between him and the other man, who might very well be your father. But, no matter what I did, I couldn't get a word out of Barberin. He only said the gentleman was not your father, but was making a search so as to return you to your family."

"And where is my family? What are their names? Have I a father and a mother?"

"That's just what I tried to get my husband to tell me, but he said he knew nothing about it. Then he added that he was going to Paris to find the musician to whom he had hired you. He had given his address as the Rue Lourcine, care of another musician named Garofoli. I kept the name in mind, so as to tell you."

"And since his departure you have had no word from Barberin?"

"No. I suppose he is still hunting. The gentleman gave him two hundred francs, and since that time he has doubtless got more from the same source. That fact, as well as the beautiful long clothes in which you were wrapped when you were found, proves that your people are rich. When I saw you back in the chimney corner, I thought you had found them. That's why I took your chum for your real brother."

At this moment Mattia passed in front of the door, and I called out to him, "I have a real family, Mattia! My parents are searching for me."

It was strange, but my chum did not seem to share my joy in this discovery.

CHAPTER XXX

THE OLD AND THE NEW FAMILY

I slept little that night. I had too many things to think about. My family was hunting for me! But, to find them, I should have to turn to Barberin. And that thought was enough to cloud whatever joy I might feel.

For it was not pity that had led this man to pick me up from the street, nor was it human kindness that had persuaded him to take me in charge. Of course, it was only because I was wrapped in expensive clothes, because some day he might derive a fine profit by returning me to my parents. He had given up hope of disposing of me honestly, so he had sold me to Vitalis. But now that affairs had taken this unexpected turn, he was planning to sell me over again.

Still, there was but one thing to do. I must go to Paris and seek for him who was looking high and low for me. Otherwise, I should never reach my relatives.

I had hoped to spend some happy and restful days with Mother Barberin, and yet tomorrow I must set forth again on the road! My new plans made it impossible for me to go and see Etiennette, as I had promised; they even forbade me to stop long enough to visit my little Lise.

In the morning Mother Barberin sided with me.

"You must get to Paris as soon as possible," she said, "for your parents are looking for you, and you must do nothing to put off their happiness."

But when Mattia heard her decision he did not agree with it at all. In fact, he shook his head violently.

"It's my belief," he asserted, "that new friends should never drive old ones out of our minds. Until yesterday, of whom did your real family consist? It consisted of Lise, Etiennette, Alexis, and Benjamin — these were the sisters and brothers who loved you dearly. Now here, all out of the blue sky, is a new family that you do not know, one which did nothing for you but leave you in the street. And without the quiver of an eyelash you desert those who have been good to you in favor of those who look bad to me. I don't think this an honest thing to do."

"You must not say that," argued Mother Barberin. "Instead of abandoning Remi, his parents lost him, or he was stolen from them."

"That's all right. But I do know that M. Acquin picked him up when he was dying in his gateway and cared for him as if he were his own child, and his children loved him as if he were indeed their brother. And I say that those who took him in and kept him have as much right to Remi as those who lost him, whether they meant to do so or whether they didn't."

"Mattia is right to be vexed with me," I said. "We can't go just now to see Etiennette, because that would cause too long a detour. Besides, Etiennette knows how to read and write; we can hear from her by letter. But it won't take much extra time to drop in on Lise, and anyway it was for her sake that I was making my rounds to call on the others. I'll give her news of Alexis and write Etiennette to send us a letter for Lise at Dreuzy."

"That's the way to talk!" said Mattia, smiling.

Well, next day I had to depart again, but this time at least I was not leaving as I had the day I started away with Vitalis. This time I could kiss Mother Barberin and promise her to come back soon with my parents. The whole evening before we left I discussed what I should give her when I was rich.

"Nothing will ever be so fine as the cow you gave me when you were a little poor boy, Remi," she told me.

. . . . Here we were on the tramp again, our luggage on our backs and Cappy leading the way. We forged ahead at a great rate, or at least we did some of the time. For in my haste to get to Paris, I often lengthened my steps without being conscious of the fact.

"You are in an awful hurry," complained Mattia.

"It seems to me you should be just as anxious," I said. "For my family will be your family. If my parents are wealthy, they will do as much for you as for me. You may be sure that we shall go to college together, travel together, always be together just as much as we want to be." But Mattia shook his head and was inconsolable.

Now, all this talk about rich parents was very interesting, but just at present we had to earn our daily bread. And there was an added reason why I wished to make as much money as possible. I had not forgotten what Mother Barberin said, that with all my wealth I could never give her such happiness as I had with the present paid for with the savings of my poverty. And I wanted Lise to be just as happy as Mother Barberin had been. The present I had decided upon was a doll, together

with a whole outfit which included a tiny dwelling house. We bought these at Decize out of our earnings. Luckily, they did not cost nearly so much as the cow.

When we left Chatillon, we followed the banks of the canal. The wooded shores, the tranquil waters, the shallops gently towed along by horses — all carried me back to the happy days on the "Swan," when with Mrs. Milligan and Arthur I had sailed on that other stream. How many times I wondered, when we were crossing a canal or skirting its banks, whether I should ever see them and their barge again. Long before this they had probably returned to England, and Arthur was cured.

As it was now autumn, our daily marches were shorter than they had been during the clear summer days, and we always tried to plan so that we might reach the villages where we were going to sleep as early as possible. However, no matter how we quickened our pace, especially toward the end of our day's march, we did not enter Dreuzy until after darkness had fallen.

To get to the house of Lise's aunt, all we had to do was to follow the canal, for Aunt Catherine's husband was a lock-keeper and lived in a house built right beside the lock he tended. This saved us the trouble of hunting up our destination, and we came upon it, situated at the end of the village in a meadow guarded by tall trees, which from a distance seemed to be floating in the mist.

My heart beat quickly as we drew near this house. Its windows were lighted by the reflection from a great fire in the chimney breast, which threw from time to time sheets of red light across our pathway.

When we were quite close to the house, I saw that the door and the windows were shut, but through one window that was without either shades or curtains I saw Lise sitting at the supper table beside her aunt. A man, her uncle without doubt, sat across from them and therefore had his back to us.

"They're having supper," Mattia said. "We're just in time."

But I signed to him and Cappy to be quiet. Then, taking my harp from my shoulder, I prepared to play.

"Aha!" said Mattia. "A serenade. That's a fine idea."

"Not for you," I whispered. "I'm going to play a solo."

And I played the first notes of my Neapolitan song, but I did not utter the words to them, because my voice would betray me.

All the time I was playing, I looked at Lise. She raised her head quickly, and I saw her eyes shine like stars. Then I began to sing. She jumped down from her chair and ran toward the door. I had barely time to hand my harp to Mattia, and then Lise was in my arms.

They made us come into the house. Aunt Catherine gave me a kiss and then put two fresh places on the table.

"Won't you please lay a third cover?" I begged. "I hope you don't mind, we've brought a little girl with us."

And from my sack I drew forth our doll. And I placed her on a chair next to Lise's.

The look in Lise's eyes I shall never forget. I can see it still.

CHAPTER XXXI

BARBERIN

If I had not been in haste to get to Paris, I should have stayed with Lise a long, long time. There was so much to talk about, and we were able to say so little with the language we used.

Lise related to me, though not in words of course, everything that concerned her life in the new home. Her uncle and aunt had treated her beautifully, just as if she had been their own child. She told me all about her occupations, her games, and her joys: she fished, had rides in boats, took walks in the deep woods. And such things took up practically all her time, for she could not go to school.

And, when my turn came, I told her how I had almost perished in the mine where Alexis worked, and how, when I got to my foster mother's house, I had been told that my family was looking for me. This explained why I could not stop to visit with Etiennette as I had planned to.

It was only to be expected that most of my talk concerned my family, my rich family. And I repeated to Lise what I had already said to Mattia, emphasizing especially what I hoped to do when I came into my fortune: make everybody happy, her father, her brothers, her sister, and above all herself.

Lise, who had not the shrewdness gained by unhappy experience like Mattia, thought that riches were a talis-

man which, just as in the fairy tales, could confer on the possessor everything worth having. This notion on her part was natural enough, for she knew that if her father had not been poor he would not have had to go to prison, and the family would not have been separated.

But we did not spend all our time talking beside the lock and listening to the water rush into the sluice gates. We three took long walks together — Lise, Mattia, and I. Or I might better have said “we five,” since Cappy and Miss Dolly were invariably members of our party.

In the evening we would sit in front of the house when it was not too damp, or before the hearth if the mist was thick, and to amuse Lise I would play on my harp. Then Mattia would take his turn with the violin or the cornet. But the thing that made me feel most proud was that Lise preferred the harp to the other instruments. When we would part at bedtime, little Lise would ask for my Neapolitan song, and I would sing it for her.

And yet, in spite of anything that I could do, we had to leave Lise and this beautiful countryside and set off for Paris. This fact was not wholly sad to me, however. For I had by now dreamed so often of being wealthy that I had actually come to believe, not only that I should be rich some day, but that I was already a millionaire. And I felt as if I had only to wish for a thing to possess it in the near future, almost at once, in fact.

My last words to Lise were, “I’ll come and get you some day soon in a four-horse coach.”

And she believed me, for she made a motion as if she were cracking a whip at each one of the four horses. She could see the wonderful carriage, too, just as clearly as I could.

If it had not been for Mattia, I should have thought of nothing more than prolonging our days' marches, contenting myself with earning our bare living on the road. Why should we take a lot of trouble now that we had no cow and no doll to buy? There was surely no sense in our making money, just to carry it home to parents who already had more than they knew what to do with.

"Oh, let's make all we can, anyway," Mattia would say, as he forced me to unsling my harp. "Who knows how long it will take us to find that pig of a Barberin?"

"We'll find him soon enough."

"You can't ever tell. He may have gone back to Chavanon. Then you'd have to write him a letter and wait for an answer. What should we live on, while we were waiting, unless we had money in our pockets? It looks as if you had forgotten all about the night you couldn't get into the Gentilly race track."

"But I haven't."

"No? Nor have I forgotten the wall of the church against which I was leaning so I wouldn't fall down and die of hunger. Paris is not a nice place to starve in."

"We'll have all the better appetite for dinner at my parents' house if we're good and hungry."

"All right, all right! Have it your own way, Director. But let's work hard, just as if we were buying a cow for your people."

This was good advice. But I must confess that I was not singing as I sang when we had to get money for Mother Barberin's cow or for Lise's doll.

"What a lazybones you'll be when you get rich!" Mattia said.

. . . . The day of our return to Paris was gray and cold. But what did I care for the whim of the weather? I was filled with an inward joy that did not depend at all on outward circumstance.

Mattia, on the other hand, grew more and more melancholy the nearer we drew to the capital city. Often he would stump along the road for hours at a time without speaking a single word to me. It was not until we made our last stop for a bite to eat, just before arriving at the gates of Paris, that he told me what had been so much on his mind.

"It's Garofoli. He may have got out of jail by this time. When I was told he had gone to prison, I forgot to ask for how long. He may thus be again at liberty and back in his lodgings in the rue de Lourcine. We are going to hunt for Barberin in the same quarter, right at Garofoli's door, so to speak. He is my master and my uncle, so if he catches me I can't escape. Oh, my poor head! How he will pound it now! You've never been beaten up with a thick cane."

That was the first thought I had given to Garofoli, I had been so wrapped up in my own affairs.

"Well," I said, after a moment's thought, "you don't need to go with me at all when I look for Barberin in the rue Mouffetard. We can decide upon a place to meet

this evening, at seven o'clock. Let's say outside the cathedral of Notre Dame."

When the time came, we parted as if we should never meet again in this life. Mattia and Cappy went off toward the Botanical Gardens, I turned my steps in the direction of the rue Mouffetard, which was only a short distance away.

I had written down the names and numbers of the places where I might find trace of Barberin, but this was not at all necessary, for I could remember them all by heart. I hunted up these addresses one after the other.

In one boarding house they growled at me, "I should say we *did* know Barberin! The scamp lived with us four or five years ago, and went away owing us a week's rent."

At the last place I had on my list, a restaurant, the proprietor said he had no idea of Barberin's whereabouts, but one of the customers informed me that three weeks before the stonemason had been lodging in the Hôtel du Cantal.

I thanked him the best I could and started for my new destination, but as I saw that I was in the neighborhood of Garofoli's residence, I thought I would inquire about the *padrone* so that I would have some news to take back to Mattia that evening. A few steps brought me to the well-remembered spot.

Just as had been the case the first time we went there, the same old fellow was hanging rags against the greenish wall of the courtyard. It looked as if he had been doing this thing ever since I last saw him.

"Is M. Garofoli back?" I asked.

The old man stared at me and had quite a fit of coughing before he finally managed to reply. I saw I might not get anything out of this old ragpicker unless I showed him that I knew where Garofoli was.

"Is he still in jail?" I said. "I thought he'd get tired of it before this."

"Perhaps he has. He's got another three months to serve, just the same."

If Garofoli's sentence had another three months to run, Mattia might rest easy, for before that date my parents would have found some way to prevent the *padrone* from getting hold of his nephew.

Without losing a moment, I hurried off in search of Barberin. I was so filled with hope and joy by what I had just heard that I was quite inclined to believe the stonemason a half-decent fellow. Why, if it had not been for him, I should probably have died of hunger and exposure in the spot where I had been abandoned! It was true that he had taken me from Mother Barberin to sell me to Vitalis, but he had no especial love for a child he scarcely knew and, besides, he had been driven to the deed by poverty, which is a great incentive to evil practices. Why, at just that moment he was hunting for me so that he could restore me to my own family! Just as a matter of conscience, I must show myself thankful to him.

When I reached the place I was seeking, I found it was a hotel only in name; as a matter of fact, it was a ramshackle old boarding house. The landlady was an old

woman suffering from the dropsy and half deaf. I put my usual question to her, whereupon she cupped her hand behind her ear and asked me to repeat what I had said.

"I want to see Barberin of Chavanon," I shouted. "He's living with you here, isn't he?"

At this, she threw up her hands with so abrupt a movement that the cat who was asleep in her lap jumped to the floor in fright.

"Alas!" she cried, shaking her head violently from side to side, "you're too late. So you are the boy he was looking for!"

At her words my heart stopped.

"Why, what's wrong with Barberin?" I demanded excitedly.

"He's dead, that's all," she answered.

All at once I was so weak that I had to lean upon my harp for support. "Why, when did he die?" I cried, loudly enough for her to hear, but in a voice that ended with a squawk.

"A week ago today in St. Anthony's Hospital."

I was thunderstruck. How could I ever find my family now? I did not know which way to turn.

"Then you are the boy that he was trying to restore to a wealthy family!" the old hag went on to say.

"Of course I am. Go on and tell me something about them."

"I don't know a thing besides what I've already told, my young gentleman."

"But surely Barberin confided something to you. Don't keep me in agony. Can't you see how I'm suffering?"

The landlady did not reply to my prayer. She threw up her hands a second time, as if she was overcome by the irony of fate.

"Well, of all the things!" she exclaimed.

At this moment a woman entered the room where we were. She was dressed like a servant and acted like one. The mistress of the Hôtel du Cantal turned her back upon me and addressed the newcomer.

"The most terrible thing has happened! This young gentleman is the one Barberin was always talking about. Here he is, and Barberin under the ground! What do you make of that?"

"Did Barberin tell you anything?" I asked anew, of the servant.

"A hundred times Barberin spoke of your rich family, but never a word as to their name or where they lived. He was the sly fox! He wanted the whole reward for himself. He was a bad one, if you ask me."

I put my head in my hands. But, rack my brains as I would, I could think of nothing to do. I could not think clearly.

"He got a letter, a registered one, I remember," said the old woman, after she had pondered for quite a while.

"Do you suppose we could find it still?"

"No. For after he was dead we looked through his things, so we could learn where to send news to his wife. We found nothing. The hospital said there were no papers in his clothes. If we hadn't heard him say he was from Chavanon, we could not have sent word to his home."

"And you did this?"

"Indeed we did!"

Well, one thing was sure: there was no use bothering these people further. They might be trusted to have tried hard to get hold of the secret Barberin had withheld from them. So I thanked them and turned to go.

"And where are you going in such a hurry?" the old woman asked.

"To meet my friend."

"Does your friend live in town here?"

"No, we only got in this morning."

"Well, then, if you haven't chosen a hotel already, you can find rooms here. We'll treat you well, be assured of that, and it is an honest house. Remember that if your family gets tired of waiting to hear from Barberin, they'll look for you here and nowhere else. That would be a big advantage for you. I say this in your own interest. Tell me, how old is your friend?"

"Oh, he's a little younger than I am."

"Just hear that! Two little lads on the streets of Paris! You may fall in with evil companions. You might innocently come to lodge in some wicked hotel. With us, everything is real respectable, because we are in such a nice neighborhood."

I had not been much impressed by the character of the locality. The Hôtel du Cantal was one of the dirtiest tenements it had ever been my fortune to see. And I had seen enough wretched places in my wanderings up and down the world! Still, the old woman's proposal was worth thinking over. It was no time to be dainty. I

certainly could not go and live with my parents in a beautiful hotel on the boulevards or in their splendid mansion until I found out who they were. We should have to reckon the cost of things, too. Ah, dear old Mattia had been right in urging me to make money on the way from Dreuzy to Paris! What should we be doing now if we hadn't seventeen francs in our pockets?

"What will you charge for a room for my friend and me?" I asked.

"Ten pennies a day. That's cheap enough."

"All right. We'll be here this evening."

"Come back early. Paris is a bad place for boys after dark."

Night overtook me before I had thought it possible. I must have wandered about more than I had imagined, so wrapped up in my thoughts that I was only half-conscious of what was going on around me.

The street lamps were being lighted; it was time for me to turn my steps toward Notre Dame, whose two towers I could see far away, sketched in black against the purpling background. When I reached the cathedral, I sank wearily down upon a bench beside it, for my legs refused to bear my weight another minute. For endless moments I had no other amusement than to observe the passers-by and to count the strokes of the clock that every now and then sounded the dragging hours.

A little after seven I heard a joyous barking. Almost immediately thereafter I perceived a white body tearing in my direction. Cappy sprang upon my knees and licked my hands as if he never would stop. I hugged him tight

and kissed his nose. In this great Paris, so full of light and noise and bustle, I had been feeling very unhappy — more so than if I had been in the woods or the open fields.

Mattia appeared a moment later.

"Well?" he cried, before he reached me.

"Barberin is dead."

At that, he started to run to me. In a few hurried words I related everything I had done and discovered.

Then he showed me a sympathy which warmed my heart. I saw at once that, much as he feared my family because of the change it would mean in his own fortunes, he was yet sincerely desirous that I should find them for my own good.

He tried his best to console me.

"If your parents have really found Barberin," he said, "they will be disturbed not to get any word from him. They'll want to find out what has happened, and the first place they'll look is the Hôtel du Cantal. So that's the place for us to go. Matters will be delayed a few days; that's the worst that can happen."

This was exactly what the trembly old woman had told me. However, on the lips of Mattia the words somehow seemed to assume a new importance. It was at that point that I gave him the news about Garofoli's sentence.

"Three months more!" he cried.

And he began to dance a jig right in the middle of the street, singing at the top of his lungs. Suddenly he stopped and said, "Isn't it comic? You're unhappy because you can't find your people, and I dance and sing because I've lost mine!"

Now, the hotel to which we went may have been an honest house, but it was not an attractive one. We found our room was a little smoky bandbox up under the roof, so narrow that one of us had to sit on the bed if the other wanted to stand up.

The loaf of bread smeared with Italian cheese which was our supper did not bear much resemblance to the splendid dinner I had dreamed of offering Mattia at the end of our first day in Paris. But, anyhow, everything was not lost. We must have patience and my beloved dream would come true.

With this thought in my mind, I fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXXII

INQUIRIES

The following morning I began the day by writing to Mother Barberin to tell her what I had learned. And this letter cost me no small effort.

How should I speak of her husband who was dead? She must have had some affection for him, coarse though he was. And she would be pained if I did not show some interest in her sorrow.

Finally, for better or for worse, the letter was ended. I told her, of course, chiefly about my own disappointment and hopes, and closed by asking her to let me know immediately if my family should write for news of Barberin, and to send their address to me at the Hôtel du Cantal in Paris.

This duty done, Mattia and I went to visit Lise's father in prison. He was overjoyed to see us and to hear good news of Alexis and of his littlest child. We talked my plans over at length, and he advised me to remain at the Hôtel du Cantal, for, like the others, he believed it to be the one place to which sooner or later my people would come to find me.

Time hung very heavily on our hands for the next two days, although Mattia forced me to go out on the streets with him and give our performances. We were lucky in the way of cash receipts for our playing and singing. The very first day, I remember, we took in eleven francs.

Four days after I had sent my letter to Mother Barberin I got word from her; a neighbor had done the actual writing for her. Among other things, she said that she had received word from Barberin and was inclosing his letter, thinking I might like to read what he had said shortly before his death, particularly as part of it concerned my family. It was with trembling hand and bated breath that I opened this second letter. It ran as follows:

MY DEAR WIFE,

Here I am in the hospital, so ill that I doubt whether I ever get back on my feet again. If I had strength enough I would tell you how I happened to be laid up, but that wouldn't help matters any. It is best, therefore, to get right down to business. This letter is to tell you that, if I do not get well, you must write to Greth and Galley, Green Square, Lincoln's Inn, London. These are the solicitors who are in charge of the search for Remi. Tell them that you alone can give them news regarding the child, and you be careful to make them pay well for this information, for the money you get from them will provide comfort for you in your old age. You can find out what has become of Remi by writing to a man named Acquin, formerly a gardener but now imprisoned in the Clichy Jail, Paris. Ask the priest to write all your letters for you, because you must trust nobody else in this business. But don't take any steps until you learn of my death.

BARBERIN

I had hardly got to the last word of this letter before Mattia jumped up with a cry.

"Hurrah! We're off for foggy London!" he shouted.

I was so overcome by what I had been reading that I looked at my friend for some time before it occurred to me what he was saying.

"Oh, I wish you had turned out to be an Italian!" he sighed. "But, don't you see? if the lawyers who are in charge of the search for you are English, why then your parents must be English too!"

"Suppose I write to these solicitors before we take any steps?"

"What good would that do? It's better to talk than to write. Besides, we've got forty-three francs, and that's more than we'll need to reach London. We'll hike to Boulogne, and from there we'll take a boat. That won't cost much."

Still I could not make up my mind right away to such an important step. And it was then that Mattia used his slickest argument.

"Listen," he said. "If your parents should find you here in Paris, they might not want to take me back to their home with you. But if I'm in England with you when we discover them, then they would hardly send me packing back to France."

"All right!" I said, without further thought. "Let's start."

In two minutes our few belongings were stuffed into our knapsacks, and we hurried downstairs. . . .

It took us more than a week to cover the distance from Paris to Boulogne, for we halted in the principal towns along the route long enough to give several performances and thus bolster up our capital. When we



Remi and Mattia pause for a moment on their way from Paris to Boulogne

got to Boulogne we had thirty-two francs left in our purse, much more than was required for our passage money.

As Mattia had never seen the ocean, our first stroll was down to the docks. For several minutes my friend gazed with bewildered eyes at the misty depths of the far horizon, and then he found his tongue to declare the whole scene ugly, sad, and dirty.

I was much offended. I insisted that this green expanse of waste waters, with its dim sky lines, its great clouds driven in confusion before the salt winds, was much more to my liking than the blue sea and the blue skies of the south.

"You talk that way because you are English," Mattia replied. "And you love this awful thing because it belongs to your country."

The boat for London left next morning at four o'clock. At half-past three we were aboard and had installed ourselves at our ease in the shelter of a great heap of boxes and freight, which in some small measure protected us from the raw wind that was both wet and cold.

Poor Mattia, how deathly sick he was! At first he rather enjoyed the pitching and rolling of the heavy cargo boat as it thrust its broad nose into the tremendous seas. But the time came when, after a long interval of silence, he struggled groaning to his feet.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked.

"The old ship is dancing too much," he said. "And I've got the funniest feeling down in the pit of my stomach."

"That's seasickness."

"Do you suppose I don't know it?"

I put my arms around his quivering body and pushed his head down against my chest, but that did not seem to mend matters for him. He would sputter and growl a while, and then he would stagger to the side of the boat and totter around for some minutes before he wandered back to sit close to me again.

Even when we were no longer in the open sea, but had entered the mouth of the Thames River, he took no interest in what I excitedly called to his attention.

"Let a fellow sleep, can't you?" he would whine.

As we approached London, it seemed to me that I had never seen so many ships and buildings in all my life as lined both shores of the broad river. But, unfortunately, the fog and the clouds of smoke were getting thicker. Except through the rifts caused by an occasional puff of wind, one could not see much in any direction, and the nearer the great city we drew, the less clearly could one see natural objects. At last, the ship slowed down, the pulse of the engines ceased entirely, and cables were thrown to the dock. We were in London, and we left the ship meekly in the midst of a throng of people who stared at us in silence. One might think it was against the law to speak in England.

"Here is the chance to practice your English, Mattia," I said.

My friend had been adding to his slender knowledge of this new language, all the way from Paris to Boulogne, by taking lessons of me. I had taught him the best I

knew, relying upon my memories of the instruction I had enjoyed when with Vitalis, and later in the Acquin home, when I read aloud to Lise.

And Mattia, never bashful about displaying his knowledge, whatever it might be, walked up to a big man with a red beard and, hat in hand, asked politely to be shown the way to Green Square.

It seemed to take Mattia some time to conclude his conversation with this man, who had to repeat his words over and over again. But I was not inclined to doubt the learning of my friend.

Finally he was through and returned to my side.

"It's very easy," he said. "All you have to do is stick to the river bank. We go right along the docks."

All of which was fine. The only trouble was that London, at the time we first landed there, did not have any docks at all!

We lost ourselves a hundred times, despite our inquiries of many policemen. But we always found our way again, sooner or later. And just when we were beginning to despair a little, we came to Temple Bar. A few steps farther brought us to Green Square.

While Mattia stopped to question the shadow of a man whom we saw but dimly through the heavy fog, my heart beat so that I could scarcely breathe. Then I followed Mattia and we halted before a door which was adorned by a copper shield, on which we read: "Greth and Galley." Mattia waited patiently until I could summon up my courage to proceed, and then he rang the doorbell and we entered.

After but a short delay we were shown into a room full of books and documents. A gentleman was seated at a desk. Beside him sat another gentleman dressed in a great robe and capped with a wonderful wig. In his hand he was holding several blue-covered bags.

The clerk who had shown us in explained what Mattia had told him regarding the nature of our errand, and then the two men studied us silently from head to foot.

"Which of you is the child brought up by Barberin?" the lawyer seated at the desk asked in French.

The moment I heard the language I knew, I felt much reassured and stepped forward.

"That's me, sir."

"Where is Barberin?"

"He is dead."

The two men looked at each other a moment, and then the one with the blue bags in his hand got up and went away.

"How did you get here, then?" asked the gentleman who had first started to question me.

"Walked from Paris to Boulogne, came from there by boat. We landed not long ago."

"Barberin give you any money?"

"We didn't see him."

"Then how did you know where to come?"

I told him in as few words as possible what he wanted to know.

I had, of course, to tell him how I had been brought up by Barberin, how I had been sold to Vitalis, how, on my master's death, I had been taken in by the Acquin

family, and finally how, when the father had been put in the debtors' prison, I had taken up my old calling of strolling minstrel.

All the time I was talking, the gentleman was making notes, and staring at me in a way I found embarrassing. He had a hard face, and there was something crafty in his smile.

"And what boy is this?" he asked, pointing at Mattia with the end of his penholder.

"A friend, comrade, and brother."

"Aha! An acquaintance you made during your wanderings, I suppose?"

"The dearest sort of brother any one could have!"

"Oh, that's very nice, I'm sure."

Then it seemed to be the proper moment for me to ask the question that had been on my mind since the beginning of our interview.

"Does my family live in England, sir?"

"Of course. Right here in London, at least for the moment."

"And I am going to see them soon?"

"You will be with them in a few minutes. I am going to have you taken to them."

He rang a bell.

"Just one more thing, sir, I beg! Have I a father?"

It was all I could do to say the word "father."

"Not only a father, but a mother, brothers, and sisters."

"O sir —"

But the door opened to cut short my excited statement.

I could only look at Mattia, my eyes full of tears.

The lawyer said something in English to the clerk who appeared in answer to the bell. I thought he instructed this man to take charge of us. I got up from my chair.

"Oh, I forgot," said the lawyer, "your name is Driscoll. It is the name of your father."

Despite his evil face, I think I could have thrown my arms around his neck if he had given me the opportunity. But his hand was pointing at the door, so we departed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DRISCOLL FAMILY

The clerk made us get into a cab that was not closed in front. The driver, instead of being seated on his box behind the horse, was perched high in the air, up behind us. I learned later that this was called a hansom cab.

Our guide then engaged in a dialog with the driver through a small trap in the hood of our vehicle. The name of Bethnal Green was pronounced several times, and I thought this might be the quarter where my parents lived. I knew that "green" in English meant a sort of meadow or park, and so I had a pleasant picture of beautiful trees and open sky.

We rolled along with fair speed through the broad streets, but saw little of what we were passing because of the dense fog. This proved so thick that Mattia and I, crowded into a corner of the seat, could hardly breathe.

It seemed as if we should never stop traveling — it had already been a long time since we left Greth and Galley's — but this only confirmed me in the belief that my people lived in the country. Soon, without doubt, we should be leaving the narrow streets through which we had been bowling for some time past, and emerge into the outskirts of London.

But, instead of reaching the country, we kept entering streets that were narrower than any thus far, and from time no time we could hear the whistling of locomotives.

Nothing gave promise of the country. Everything indicated that we were in a wretched part of town. The mud fairly swamped our cab, it splashed in on us in great masses, the foul odor of stagnant water had been present for ever so long. It seemed, now and then, as though we were retracing our tracks, as if our coachman had small idea of where we were.

Finally he stopped altogether, and then through the trap door in the roof a long discussion took place. Mattia whispered to me that he understood the driver refused to go on because he didn't know the way. And when he demanded the direction from Greth and Galley's clerk, the latter told him he had never been in this thieves' district before. Thieves! What could that mean?

Assuredly, this was not Bethnal Green! What was happening?

Finally, the clerk handed some money to the protesting driver and told us to get out of the cab. We obeyed, the coachman drove off cursing, and we were stranded in a muddy street, in the midst of the eternal fog.

We stood before a brilliantly lighted shop which the English call a gin palace. We followed our guide.

Decidedly, it seemed as if I had been wrong in thinking we were in a slum district, for I had never seen anything more luxurious than this barroom. There were great looking-glasses everywhere and decorations in gilt and gold leaf. The bar itself looked as if it were made of solid silver. And yet the customers who were standing before it, or leaning against the walls, were in rags. Some of them were even without shoes, and their naked

feet, which had been splashing around in the filth of the gutters, were as black as if they had been coated with a shoe polish which had not yet had time to dry.

At this shining silver bar our guide ordered and drank a glass of white, sweet-smelling liqueur. Then he asked the shirt-sleeved individual who had served him the drink how he could find the address for which he was searching.

Once more we started on our way, at the heels of our guide. From the street we passed into a lane, then through a courtyard, and then back into the alleyway again. The tenements were more terrible than in the wretchedest village in France. Many were built of cheap lumber like shanties or barns. Bareheaded women and half-clothed children crowded the doorsteps. From one house to another wash lines were swung, and rags and tattered clothes hung from them. In one lane we crossed, pigs were wallowing in the stagnant water, from which an unbearably foul odor arose.

Our guide hesitated, and finally stopped. He had lost his way. But at this moment there came toward us a man clad in a long blue coat and wearing a hat of varnished leather. It was a policeman. A conversation followed, and a moment later we set out again, preceded by the officer of the law. At last we came to a halt in a yard in the middle of which there was a small pond.

"Here is your Red Lion Court," said the policeman.

Why were we stopping here? It was impossible that this sinkhole was Bethnal Green and that my people lived here. And yet —

Our guide knocked at the door of a kind of wooden

lean-to. The clerk thanked him, and he departed. Had we actually reached my home?

Mattia, who had not let go my hand, pressed it, and I answered his gesture of sympathy. We understood each other's feelings. We found that we had entered an enormous room, which was lighted by a lamp and a peat fire that was burning in the grate.

Before the fire in a wicker arm-chair there was sitting, immovable as a statue, a white-bearded old man, his head covered by a black skull cap. Opposite each other, but separated by a table, were seated a man about forty years of age and a blond-haired woman some five or six years younger. In the room there were besides four children, two boys and two girls, all with fair hair and blue eyes like their mother's. The oldest of the boys was about eleven or twelve, the youngest girl some three years old.

I had taken in this scene with a single glance before our guide, the clerk from Greth and Galley's, had finished the conversation.

What was he saying? I heard little of his talk and understood even less. The only intelligible sounds that met my ear were the name Driscoll and my own.

All eyes were turned to Mattia and me, even those of the motionless old man. The little girl was the only one to take notice of Cappy.

"Which of you two is Remi?" the man at the table asked me in French.

"I am," I answered as I stepped forward.

"Then come to your dear father, my lad."

When I had looked forward to this moment, I had

imagined that I should feel a warm enthusiasm that would drive me into the outstretched arms of my father, but I felt no such yearning impulse. None the less, I went up to my father and kissed him.

"And now," he continued, "here are your grandfather, your mother, and your brothers and sisters."

I walked over to my mother first, and she put her arms around me. She coolly suffered me to kiss her, and she spoke a few words to me that I did not understand.

"Give your hand to Grandfather," my father directed, "but be gentle about it. He is paralyzed."

I shook hands with my brothers and my oldest sister. I should have liked to take the baby in my arms, but as she was wholly wrapped up in Cappy she paid no attention to me.

As I went from one to another, I was vexed with myself. What was wrong with me? I did not feel at all glad to have found my family at last. Here I was reunited with them, and I remained as cold as ice. I had look forward to this moment with feverish longing, I had been wild with joy at the thought that I, too, was going to have a family — parents whom I would love and who would love me. And now I stood embarrassed, studying them with curiosity, finding nothing in my heart to say to them, not a single tender word. I must indeed be a selfish monster.

If I had found them in a palace instead of a hut, should I have had quite a different set of feelings? This idea clung to my mind and made me feel ashamed. So I went back to my mother, put my arms around her neck,

and kissed her full on the lips. Doubtless she did not understand the cause of this tenderness, for instead of returning my caress she only gazed at me in a lazy manner. Then she shrugged her shoulders slightly and said a few words to her husband, which I did not catch, but which made him break out laughing. This indifference on her part, and the mocking smile on his, cut me to the quick. It seemed as if my show of affection had deserved a better reward.

But I was not given time to examine my own feelings.

"And who is that other chap?" asked my father, pointing at Mattia.

I explained the ties that bound me to my friend and did my best to explain the great debt I owed him.

"Good enough!" said my father. "And I suppose he wants to stay a while and see the country."

I was about to reply, but Mattia cut me short.

"That's it exactly," he said.

"And why didn't Barberin come with you?" my father went on.

I said that Barberin was dead and buried. And I pictured my great disappointment on arriving in Paris, where I had gone on learning that my parents were searching for me.

This was all duly translated to my mother, and I could not help but see that she was pleased to learn of the death of Barberin. Why? I could not guess the answer to this riddle.

"Weren't you astonished, Remi, that we should suddenly have determined to look for you through Barberin,

after we had not tried to discover your whereabouts for thirteen years?"

"Oh, yes, I was awfully curious about it."

"Come over to the fire and I'll tell you about it."

When I had first come into the hovel, I had leaned my harp against the wall, and now I unbuckled my knapsack and then sat down in the place my father indicated.

But as I stretched out my wet and muddy legs to get them warm, my grandfather made a spitting noise, quite like an angry old tomcat. I could see fast enough that I irritated him, and I drew my legs back in a hurry.

"Don't mind him," my father said. "The old man doesn't like to have any one else enjoy his fire. You just warm yourself as much as you like, don't you worry in the least."

I was much taken aback to hear such words about the old white-haired man. But I kept my legs tucked under my chair.

"You are our eldest son," my father began, "born one year after our marriage. When I wedded your mother, there was a young girl who thought she was going to be my wife, and when she found out the contrary she revenged herself by stealing you, carrying you off to Paris, and deserting you there. We searched as hard as we could, of course, but had no idea you had been taken so far away. We imagined you were dead and lost to us forever, until three months ago, when this woman was seized with a mortal illness. She revealed the truth. I went at once to France and discovered by the police records that you had been adopted by the mason who

found you, so I set right off for Chavanon. There Barberin told me he had hired you to a strolling player named Vitalis and that you were tramping through France with him. As I could not afford to stay and hunt the whole country over, I gave Barberin money to continue the search for me, and asked when he had any news to communicate with my solicitors, Greth and Galley. I did not leave my address with Barberin, for we put up in London only during the winter season. The good part of the year we are on the road about England and Scotland in our wagons, for we are peddlers by trade. That's the story, my lad, of how you have been found and restored to us after thirteen years. I realize you must be a little bewildered at first, for you don't know us and can't understand what we are saying when we speak English. But I hope for your sake that you'll get used to us very quickly."

I supposed I should, for were they not my own family?

Well, the fine baby clothes had lied, that was all! This was too bad for Mother Barberin, for Lise, for Father Acquin, and for all those who had loved and helped me. I could not do for them what I had dreamed of doing. My parents were peddlers, lived crowded together in a hovel, and could not be rich, but what did such things matter? Affection was better than gold, and it was not money that I wanted, but love.

While I had been listening to my father's story, the table had been set. A big roast of beef on a pewter dish occupied the center of the table; the meat was surrounded by boiled potatoes.

"Are you hungry, my hearties?" my father asked of Mattia and me.

Mattia's only answer was a grin that showed all his teeth.

"Well, then, let's get busy," said my father.

Before he sat down, he pushed my grandfather's arm-chair up to the table. Then, taking his place at the head of the table, with his back to the fire, he started to carve the roast and served each one a big slice with potatoes.

Although I had not been brought up to have the best of table manners, I could not help noticing that my brothers and my older sister ate more often with their fingers than with their forks. They stuck their hands in the gravy and licked them off afterward. My grandfather was no better; the one hand he could use was always on its way from his plate to his mouth. When he would drop a piece from his trembling fingers, my brothers laughed at him.

After supper was over, I imagined we should spend the evening before the fire. But it appeared that my father was expecting company and that we had to go to bed. He took a candle and led us to a shed which opened off the room where we had eaten. There were standing two of the big vans so much used by peddlers. He opened the door of one of these, and there we saw two beds, one above the other.

"There are your places to sleep," he said. "Pleasant dreams!"

Such was my reception on the part of my family, the Driscolls.

CHAPTER XXXIV

HONOR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER

When my new-found parent left us, he let us keep the candle, but he locked the door of the van on the outside. The only thing to do was go to bed, and we set about this without chattering as we usually did, and saying nothing about our experiences of the day.

Mattia did not want to talk any more than I did, and I was thankful for his silence. But, when the candle was put out, I simply could not close my eyes. I started to think about all that had happened, while I twisted and turned about on my narrow cot. And I could hear Mattia, who was directly over me, thumping around likewise — a sure proof that he was no more inclined to slumber than I.

Sleep did not come. As time went on, the vague fear that was oppressing me increased. What was I afraid of, in heaven's name? I couldn't seem to tell, and yet the fact remained — I was afraid. It couldn't be the fear of being shut up in a caravan, in the midst of this wretched district of Bethnal Green. How often, in my life as a vagabond, had I spent the night with less protection than I was now enjoying! I realized well enough that I was sheltered from any actual danger, and yet I was in a cold sweat.

The hours dragged by one after the other without my knowing how late it was, for there were no clocks in the

neighborhood that struck. All of a sudden I heard a fairly loud noise at that door of the shed which opened on another street than Red Lion Court. This sound was followed by several knocks at regular intervals, and a light shone into our van.

Surprised, I glanced quickly around, while Cappy, who was sleeping against my cot, woke up and growled. Then I noticed that this light came in through a small window inserted in the wall of our caravan, against which our beds were built. I had not noticed the pane before this, because its inside surface was covered by a curtain. Half of this window was in Mattia's berth and half in mine. Not wanting Cappy's barking to arouse the whole household, I put my hand over his muzzle, and then I peered out.

My father had entered the shed. He threw open the door that led to the street, moving quickly and without noise. He shut it again in the same manner, after having admitted two men who were carrying immense loads on their shoulders.

With one hand at his lips, he made a signal to preserve absolute silence; with the other hand that was clutching a dark lantern he pointed out the wagon in which we were supposed to be sleeping. My father evidently wished to warn the men not to be careless, for fear of awaking us.

This kindly thought touched me, and I was about to call that there was no need of being so quiet, when it struck me that if I spoke I might disturb Mattia, who I fancied was now dozing. So I was as quiet as a mouse.

My father helped the two men off with their bundles.

Then he went away for a moment, only to reappear with my mother. While he was gone, the men opened their sacks. One was filled with bolts of cloth. The other contained goods from a men's furnishing store: underwear, shirts, stockings, gloves, and neckties. Then I knew that these people must be peddlers come to sell their wares to my parents.

My father picked up each piece of goods separately, studied it carefully close to the lantern, and handed it to my mother. She would snip off the sale tickets with a pair of small scissors, and would then stuff the labels into her pocket. This seemed strange to me, as did the hour at which the transaction took place.

While this examination of materials was under way, my father spoke several words to the men who had brought in the bundles. His voice was lowered to a whisper; besides, I knew almost no English. So I caught nothing I was sure of except the expressions *bobby* and *policeman*. These were repeated many times.

After the contents of the sacks had been carefully examined, all four of these people left the shed and went into the house. Once more all was dark about us. Apparently my parents had taken the peddlers into the house to pay them their bill.

I tried to convince myself that there was nothing out of the ordinary in what I had witnessed. But somehow I could not do this, no matter how hard I tried. Why did any one wishing to visit my parents not go to their door through Red Lion Court? Why had they discussed policemen in a low tone, as if they were afraid of being

overheard? Why did my mother cut off the sale tickets attached to the goods, after she had purchased them?

I tried to drive these thoughts out of my mind, but was not successful. After a short interval I saw the light again flooding our caravan; once more I looked through the window pane. This time I did not wish to look, but I could not refrain from doing it. I had a feeling it would be better not to eavesdrop, and yet my curiosity overcame my scruples.

Father and Mother were alone. While my mother was making two bundles of the goods they had bought, my father was sweeping out a corner of the shed floor. Beneath the dry sand that he thus thrust to one side there was a hidden trap door. He raised the lid, and after his partner had finished her work he took the packages down some steps into a cave, the depth of which I could not see. My mother lighted his way with the lantern. After some minutes he reappeared, closed down the trap behind him, and with the broom again swept back the sand he had displaced. Upon this they threw some straw, such as covered the rest of the floor. Then they went away.

Just as they were closing the door of the shed softly after them, I thought I heard Mattia stir a little on his bed, as if he were laying his head back upon its pillow.

Could he have seen what happened? I did not dare to ask him. I was now afraid in good earnest. I was shaking nervously from head to foot. I did not sleep a wink until after a rooster somewhere in the neighborhood had announced the coming of day. And then I fell into a dull and fevered sleep, full of hag-ridden nightmares.

The noise of a key being turned in the lock of the van door awoke me. Imagining it must be my father coming to tell me it was time to get up, I shut my eyes to avoid seeing him.

"It was your brother who came to free us," Mattia said. "He has gone."

We rose and dressed. Mattia did not inquire how I had slept, nor did I question him. When I caught his glance on me, I looked in another direction.

When we entered the kitchen neither my father nor my mother was there. My grandfather was seated before the fire as if he had not budged an inch since the night before. My older sister, Annie, was clearing off the table, and the bigger of my brothers, Allen, was sweeping out the room. I went up to give them my hand, but they continued their work as if they had not seen me. So I walked toward Grandfather, but he did not let me get near him. He spit at me, and this action brought me up short.

"Won't you ask him," I said to Mattia, "when I am going to see my father and mother this morning?"

Mattia did as he was told, and my grandfather, hearing him speak English, seemed to grow more amiable. His face lost something of its terrifying fixity, and he deigned to make a reply.

"What does he say?" I asked.

"That your father has left for the day, while your mother is asleep. We may go walking if we want to."

"Was that all he said?" I persisted, for it seemed as if Mattia's translation of the old man's remarks was pretty short.

Mattia appeared embarrassed by my question.

"I may not have understood the rest," he said.

"Then tell me what you thought he said."

"He warned us not to fail to take advantage of any good chance we might see in town. And then he added we must remember that bright people lived at the expense of fools."

My grandfather seemed to guess what Mattia was explaining to me, for when he heard my friend's closing words, with the hand that was not paralyzed he made a gesture as if he were stuffing something secretly into his pocket, and he favored me with a big wink.

"Come on," I said to Mattia.

For two or three hours we strolled around in the neighborhood of Red Lion Court, not daring to get far away for fear we might be lost. Bethnal Green appeared more terrible in daylight than it had seemed at night.

Mattia and I exchanged expressive looks, but said nothing.

Finally, when we turned to go home, we found ourselves quite near one end of the court, and soon had re-entered the house.

My mother was up and about. From the doorway I saw her sitting bent forward at the table, her head resting in her hands. Thinking she might be sick, I ran to kiss her good morning, because I could not speak to her in English. I put my arms around her. She raised her head, but it kept swaying from one side to the other. Then for the first time I was conscious of the odor of liquor on her hot breath. I started back, confused. She

let her head fall back upon her arms that were outspread upon the table.

"Gin," said my grandfather, grinning. And he said a few words that I could not understand.

At first I stood motionless, as if deprived of all sensation. A few seconds later I cast a glance at Mattia, in whose eyes tears were standing. I signaled him, and again we stole away.

Hand in hand we walked along the streets for quite a while, looking straight in front of us and paying no attention to where we were going.

"Where are you headed for?" Mattia asked anxiously.

"I don't know. Anywhere where we can have a talk. I have something to say to you, and we can't speak here in this crowd."

My resolution was made, I knew what I had in mind to say. By this time we had come to a big park with immense green meadows and with clumps of trees here and there. In this place surely we should not be overheard.

"You know that I love you, Mattia," I began, "and you know it was my love for you that made me want you to come to my parents' home with me. You won't doubt that, no matter what I say now?"

"Don't be foolish!" my friend said, forcing a smile.

"You are trying to laugh so I won't feel so bad," I went on. "But that doesn't help any, for if I can't break down and cry with you, when can I cry?"

I caught hold of Mattia and gave way to tears. I had never before felt so lost and deserted in the midst of the

great world. After a fit of sobbing, I forced myself to be calm. It was not to win Mattia's pity that I had brought him to the park, it was to help him.

"Mattia," I said, "you must leave me and go back to France."

"Leave you?" he cried. "Never!"

"I knew beforehand what you would say, and I am awfully glad you want to stick by me. But, no matter where you go, Mattia, you must not stay in England any longer."

"Why don't you come along with me?"

"Because I'll have to stay in London with my family. It is my duty to stay with my parents. Take the balance of our money, and go away as soon as you can."

"If any one ought to go, Remi, it's you."

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, just because —"

He could not finish, and his gaze fell before mine.

"Mattia, tell me, honest true, one thing. Don't hold anything back on my account. You weren't asleep last night? You saw?"

He kept his eyes fixed on the ground. His voice was hoarse.

"I didn't sleep much," he said.

"How much did you see?"

"Everything."

"And you understood what was going on?"

"Of course. The people who sold those goods had never bought them. Your father got angry because they knocked at the shed door instead of at the house. They

said they were being watched by the bobbies — which means policemen.”

“You can see, then, you must go.”

“Never!”

“You’re only making me feel worse by not listening to me. Look here! Suppose we had struck Garofoli in Paris and he’d made you go back to him. You wouldn’t have wanted me to stay with you, would you? I’m saying just what you would in my place.”

He did not reply.

“And when you get back to France, hunt up Lise and Father Acquin and Mother Barberin and all my friends, and tell them I can’t do for them what I promised. Explain that my people are not rich as I thought they were, and perhaps they will excuse me. It’s not a shameful thing to be poor.”

“But that is not why you want to get rid of me, so I simply refuse to leave. After what you saw last night, you’re afraid for me.”

“Please don’t say that, Mattia!”

“You’re afraid the time will come when I’ll be cutting the sale tickets off goods that haven’t been bought.”

“Keep still!”

“All I have to say is that I’m just as worried about you as you are about me. Let’s go together.”

“That’s out of the question. My parents are nothing to you, you don’t owe them anything. But they’re my family, and I’ve got to stay.”

“Your parents? I guess not! That old paralyzed fellow’s not your grandfather. That woman sprawling on

the table's not your mother, and you can't make me believe she is."

"Hush, Mattia! I forbid you to talk like that. You are saying things about my people. And I have to honor and love them."

"Surely you'd have to if they really were your own! But just suppose they're nothing of the kind!"

"You didn't listen to what my father was saying."

"I did too! But what does that prove? Why, you don't look the least bit like either your father or your mother. And if your hair is not blond, why is it that all your brothers and sisters — all of them, understand? — are fair? Then there's another astonishing thing about your father's tale: how can people who have no money spend such a lot of it to recover their child? Those are the reasons that make me believe your real name is not Driscoll. But if, in spite of anything I say, you're going to remain, then I stay, too. Anyhow, you just sit down and write Mother Barberin, and ask her to tell you the truth about those baby clothes. When we get her letter, you just have a talk with your father, as you call him, and then perhaps we'll begin to get some light on the affair. Until that time, I shan't budge. If we have to work, we'll work together."

"But suppose that some fine day they start to pound you on your head again, Mattia?"

He smiled sadly.

"Oh, this time it wouldn't hurt so much. I could stand the blows better if I were taking them for a friend."

CHAPTER XXXV

TEACHING CAPPY TO BE WICKED

Darkness had fallen by the time we got back to Red Lion Court. We had spent the whole day in strolling about the great park and talking, lunching on a loaf of bread we bought.

Neither my father nor my mother had anything to say about our long absence. After supper my father asked Mattia and me to come sit by the fire with him. This produced the customary growl from my grandfather, who certainly defended his side of the chimney breast fiercely.

"You boys tell me how you made your living in France," my father said.

I described the sort of life we led.

"We not only earned our livelihood," boasted Mattia, "but we saved up enough to buy a cow."

"You must be the right sort!" my father asserted. "Give us a sample of your skill."

I picked up my harp and played a piece, but it was not my Neapolitan song.

"Good enough!" was my father's comment. "And now let's see what Mattia knows."

Then Mattia showed his skill on the violin and the cornet. It was the latter instrument that provoked the applause of the children, who were grouped in a circle around us.

"And what about Cappy?" continued my father. "I don't suppose you're dragging a dog around with you just for fun. He ought to be able to earn his own food at least."

I was proud of Cappy's talents. I put him through some of his best tricks, and they certainly made a big hit with his audience.

"I tell you there's a fortune in that dog," said my father.

I replied to this compliment by praising Cappy and by saying that he could learn in a short time anything one wanted to teach him, even if the trick were of a kind that was beyond the intelligence of ordinary dogs.

My father translated my words into English, and it seemed as if he added some that I had not spoken, and these made everybody shake with laughter, even my grandfather. He winked his eye several times and said, "Fine dog!"

"Now before I tell you what's on my mind," my father continued, "I must know whether Mattia wants to stay in England and whether he wishes to live with us."

"I want to stay with Remi," my friend answered.

"Well, then, here is my proposal. We are not rich and we all work for our daily bread. In the summer we travel through England, and the children go around selling our goods to such people as don't want the bother of hunting us up. But in the winter we haven't much to do. Seeing we're here in London, Remi and Mattia can go out and play music on the street corners. And I don't doubt they'll do a goodish business, now that Christmas

is drawing near. But there's no use in wasting anything in this world, so Cappy will go out with Allen and Ned and give some of his performances."

"Cappy won't work well with any one but me," I put in quickly, for I could not endure the thought of being separated from the dog.

"He'll get accustomed to Allen and Ned, don't you worry. And by dividing your efforts you'll earn more money."

"But I assure you, sir, he won't do well at all. Besides, Mattia and I will earn much less without Cappy."

"That's enough from you," said my father. "When I say a thing, it's all settled. Rule of the house. See you obey it."

There was no reply possible.

We trundled off to our van to sleep. That night my father did not lock us in. When I was crawling into bed, Mattia whispered to me, "You see, the man you call your father makes not only the children work for him, but the dogs, too. Will your eyes never be opened? Tomorrow we shall write the letter to Mother Barberin."

But when next day came I had to give Cappy his instructions. I took him up in my arms and, kissing his cold nose, I explained to him very carefully what he had to do. Poor animal! What a strange look he gave me as he listened!

When I handed his leash to Allen, I told him all over again what his duty was. And he was so intelligent and so trusting that he went off with my two brothers sadly, but without making any fuss about it.

As for Mattia and me, my father himself was to conduct us to a district where we should have a good chance to make money. So we crossed the whole of London to get to a part of the city where there was nothing but beautiful mansions with porticoes situated on splendid driveways and bordered with gardens. On the wide sidewalks there were no poor people in tatters with famished faces; there were only pretty women in gaudy clothes, carriages whose panes glistened like ice, magnificent horses driven by big, fat coachmen in powdered wigs.

It was late when we returned to Red Lion Court, for it is a long way from West End to Bethnal Green. And I was glad to find Cappy, muddy, it is true, but in the best of spirits.

I was so pleased to see him that, after having scrubbed his coat with dry straw, I wrapped him up in my sheepskin coat and put him in my bed. It was hard to tell which of us was the happier.

Life went on in this way for several days. We went away in the morning and came back at night, after having played first in this part of town, then in the other, while Cappy spent his days giving performances with Allen and Ned. But one evening my father said that I could take Cappy with me next day, as he was going to keep my two brothers at home with him.

This was just fine for Mattia and me, and we promised ourselves to come home with large earnings, so that we might have the dog with us every day. We had to get Cappy back somehow, and we were determined not to spare ourselves the least effort to bring this about.

We made Cappy submit to a severe scrubbing that morning, and after breakfast we set off for that quarter which experience had taught us was the most ready to put its hand into its pocket.

It was unlucky for the success of our plan that for two days the fog had not lifted. A sort of leaden-gray smoke swept along the streets, which prevented us from seeing more than a few steps in front of us. Few people were abroad, and from the windows where they listened to our playing they could not see Cappy. This was a bad situation for our pocketbook, and I did not blame Mattia for cursing the miserable fog. We little knew the great service this same fog would prove to us a few minutes later.

We were walking rapidly along. I spoke a word to Cappy every now and then, to keep him at heel more surely than if I had a chain attached to him. At last we came to Holborn, one of the most crowded business streets of London. Suddenly I noticed that Cappy was not following us. That was odd! What had become of him? I dodged into the opening of a dark alley and whistled softly for him, since we couldn't see any distance at all. I had already begun to worry and fear that he had been stolen from us, when he made his appearance on the run, holding in his jaws a pair of wool stockings and wagging his tail. Placing his forepaws against my chest, he held up the stockings for me to take. He seemed quite proud of himself, as if he had just done one of his most difficult tricks and had come to me for petting. All this had happened inside of a few seconds, and I was standing

there overcome with amazement, when Mattia seized the stockings and dragged me farther into the alley.

"As quick as you can!" he urged me. "But don't run!"

Not until several minutes had passed did he offer an explanation of this flight.

"Like you," he said, "I was standing stock still, asking myself where this pair of stockings came from, when I heard a man calling, 'Stop thief!' The thief, Remi, was no other than Cappy. Except for the fog, we should have been arrested."

I understood only too well. For a moment I felt as if I were suffocating. They had made a thief out of my good, honest Cappy!

"Let's go back to the house," I said, "and get a chain for him."

Mattia did not answer, but we set off as fast as we could for Red Lion Court. Father, Mother, and the children were sitting around the table folding up heaps of merchandise. I threw the pair of stockings on the table. Allen and Ned laughed.

"Here's the stuff that Cappy stole," I said. "You have made a thief of him. I suppose you did it for fun."

My voice trembled as I spoke, and yet never in my life had I been so determined to do what I thought right.

"If it was in earnest, and not for fun," my father demanded, "why, what would you do about it?"

"I'd strangle Cappy with a rope, although I love him. Then I'd throw his body in the Thames. I won't have him become a thief, any more than I'll be one myself.

If I think there's any danger of it, I'll drown myself in the river along with Cappy."

My father tried to stare me out of countenance. He made a gesture as if he would strike me. His eyes glittered, but I did not lower my own. Little by little, his distorted face smoothed itself out again.

"You're right in thinking the whole business just a joke," he said. "To keep the thing from happening in the future, we'll not let Cappy go out without you."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE FINE BABY CLOTHES LIED

After my adventure with Cappy, the situation became very clear in so far as it concerned my brothers and me. I showed them that if they tried in the least to harm Cappy, they'd have me on their trail in a way they wouldn't like. I did not convey my meaning in so many words, because I couldn't speak English, but staged a pretty vivid pantomime in which my fists played the principal rôle.

As I had had to give up my two brothers for being so mean, I should have liked to have a sister anyway. But Annie, the older of the girls, wouldn't have anything to do with me, and she never lost a chance to do me an ill turn. And, I must say, she was clever enough to invent quite a few.

The whole family learned to dislike me. My grandfather never forgot to spit at me whenever I came near him, my father never said a word to me except to ask for an accounting of our earnings every night, my mother hardly knew where she was most of the time. Kate, the baby, ran to me and held up her lips for a kiss, but I am afraid this was because I always had some trifle in my pocket for her.

When Mattia would see me openly grieving at my treatment, he knew well enough what it was that brought about my sadness, and at such a time he would murmur,

as if to himself, "I am curious to see how Mother Barberin is going to answer that letter of ours."

Every day we went to the post office to look for the letter, which was to come to us addressed "general delivery." For many days our errand had been a vain one, but finally we were rewarded. I had to take a few minutes to calm down my emotion before I could make up my mind to open it. The letter had been written by the priest at Chavanon:

DEAR LITTLE REMI:

I was much surprised at what you wrote in your letter, and very sorry, too. For, according to what poor Barberin always told me, I thought your parents must be important and wealthy people.

This idea of mine was strengthened by the way you were dressed when Barberin found you, also by the fact that you were discovered in such an elegant neighborhood as the Avenue de Breteuil. I judged somewhat, too, from the conversation I overheard when the man came to Chavanon to seek you.

I can easily tell you what clothes you wore as a baby, as I kept them all to be used as proofs when your people should finally come to reclaim you. You were not swathed in wrappings such as French infants wear. You wore a lace cap of extraordinary richness and beauty, a fine linen robe with lace at the neck and the shoulders, a dainty flannel cloak, a white cashmere pelisse lined with white silk and trimmed with beautiful white embroidery, white woolen socks with silk rosettes.

None of these clothes had been marked, except the flannel shirt and your robe, and the corners of these pieces, where the marks are ordinarily put, were cut off, as if every precaution had been taken to throw searchers off the track.

There, my dear child! That's every word I can tell you. If you want the clothes themselves, write me and I'll send them on.

Don't grieve because you cannot give me all the fine presents you promised. Your cow, purchased with your hard-earned money, is more to me than all the rich gifts in the world. I am happy to write that she is always in fine health. Her milk never diminishes in quantity. And, thanks to her, I am getting along just fine. I never take a look at the cow without thinking of you and Mattia.

I shall always be most glad to hear from you—you are such an affectionate and sweet-hearted boy. I hope you will be as happy as possible, now that you have found your family, and that your father and mother will love you as you deserve.

Good-by, my dear child. I kiss you lovingly.

Your foster mother,

WIDOW BARBERIN

The closing words of this letter cut me to the heart. Because she loved me so truly, she thought everyone else would.

"She is a good woman," said Mattia, "and I am glad she still thinks of me. Now that we have so complete a description of your baby clothes, let's see what Mr. Driscoll has to say, and he'd better not get mixed up when he enumerates the articles of clothing you wore that night."

"Probably he has forgotten."

"Don't you believe it! People don't forget the clothes worn by their baby when it was kidnaped. For they are the only clues by which the stolen child can be regained."

"Let's just wait until we hear what my father replies before we engage in any more guesswork."

It was not an easy thing for me to ask my father to describe the way I was dressed when I was stolen. If I could have put the question straight out, without a hidden motive, it would have been simple enough. But the reason that underlay my purpose in asking made me timid and hesitant.

One day, when hail and sleet drove us home much earlier than usual, I got up courage to refer to the subject that was causing me such terrible anxiety.

The first word I asked, my father stared at me fixedly, as he always did when he was offended by something I had said. But I stared right back at him, a lot more bravely than I had feared I should when the critical moment had arrived.

As soon as the first flush of my father's anger had passed, he smiled. There was something hard and cruel about this grin of his, but it was better than I had hoped for.

"What was of the most use to me when I was trying to find you," he said, "was the description I could give of the clothes you were wearing when you were kidnaped. Here it is: a lace cap, a linen robe with lace at neck and shoulders, flannel cloak, white cashmere pelisse lined with white silk, white woolen socks with silk rosettes. I had counted on the laundry mark of your linen F. D. — that is to say, Francis Driscoll, which is your name. But this had been cut off by the woman who stole you. She counted on this precaution, hoping you never could be

found because of the absence of any identifying mark. I am now going to show you your certificate of baptism, which was sent me by your parish church and which I have always kept."

He rummaged around in a drawer and soon drew forth a large paper stamped with several seals. He handed me this document.

"If you are willing," I said, calling upon my courage for one last effort, "I'll have Mattia translate it for me."

"Very well."

From the translation, which Mattia made to the best of his ability, it became evident that I was born August 2, Thursday, and that I was the child of Patrick Driscoll and Margaret Grange, his wife. What more could I ask for in the way of proof?

And yet, Mattia was far from satisfied. That night, when we had retired to our caravan, he said, "All that stuff we heard and read is very, very fine. But it does not explain how Patrick Driscoll, a peddler, was rich enough to give his child lace caps and embroidered pelisses. Strolling peddlers aren't rich enough for that sort of thing."

"It's just because they were peddlers," I answered, "that they could buy such fancy things cheap."

Mattia shook his head, whistling, as if that was a new thought to him. But he bent down again and whispered in my ear, "Let me tell you, there's one notion I simply can't get rid of. It is that you are not the child of Mr. Driscoll, but you are the son of the man from whom Mr. Driscoll stole you."

I started to answer my chum, but he had already climbed up into his bed. Now, if I had been in Mattia's shoes, I should perhaps have had as much imagination as he did. But my position was such that I felt as if it was not right for me to have such wild thoughts. For I was doubting my own father, whereas Mattia was only suspecting a Mr. Driscoll of dishonesty. My friend could entertain all the dark thoughts he wanted to — I must keep tight rein on my own.

But, much as I might forbid Mattia to share his suspicions with me, he was an obstinate youngster, and I was never able to triumph over his pig-headedness.

"Why are the Driscoll children fair, while your hair is dark?" he was always asking. "And why does the whole family, except the baby Kate, have it in for you, as if you were a mangy dog? Why did poor folks dress their brats up in purple and fine linen?"

And I could answer his questions only by asking another.

"Why would the Driscolls search for me if I were not their own flesh and blood? Why had they furnished money to Barberin and to Greth and Galley?"

That would silence Mattia for the moment, but it would not convince him in the slightest.

"Anyway, what can I do about it?" I would ask in despair.

"Go back to France — that's what we can do."

"Absolutely impossible."

"Because duty makes you stick by your family, eh? But suppose they're not your family."

The sole result of these arguments was to make me unhappier than ever. What is more terrible than doubt? Yet, in spite of all I could do, my suspicions were never quieted. Who would have dared to say when he saw me cry as a child because I was an orphan that I should be weeping hopelessly because I had found my parents? How was I ever going to learn the truth about my family? And every day I was forced to go out onto the streets and sing, play dance tunes, and smile and smile, when my heart was so wretched!

It was against the law to play music on the London streets on the Sabbath Day, and so I was free, once a week at least, to pour out my heart while walking with Mattia and Cappy.

One Sunday, however, as I was just starting outdoors with my friends, my father told me he had need of me at home, so he sent Mattia out to stroll all by himself. My grandfather had not come downstairs, my mother and the children had left the house for an airing. Father and I were the only ones at home.

We had been alone for almost an hour when there was a knock at the door. My father went to open it, and returned to the kitchen accompanied by a gentleman who bore small resemblance to the usual visitors to the house. He was a really fine gentleman, according to the English idea: he was elegantly dressed and had a haughty expression on his face, but with a sort of tired look about it. He must have been about fifty years of age. What struck me right away was his smile, which when his lips moved back showed teeth as white and pointed as those

of a young dog. At such a time he looked as if he wanted to bite somebody.

While he was talking to my father in English, he kept turning every instant to take a look at me. But when he saw that I was conscious of his gaze, he would turn away at once. After a while he stopped speaking English and began to speak French.

"Is this the young lad you mentioned to me? He seems to be in good health."

"Answer the gentleman," my father said.

"Yes, I am well, thank you," I replied.

"You're never been ill at all?"

"Once I had the pneumonia."

"Indeed! And how did that happen?"

"Three years ago I slept out all night in the freezing cold. My master who was with me in the snow died, I got off with a bad attack of pneumonia."

"Have you felt any bad effects from it since that time?"

"None at all."

"No fatigue, faintness, night sweats?"

"Not a touch. When I'm worn out, it's because I've been tramping a lot, but that doesn't make me ill."

He got up from his chair and came over to me. He felt my arms, put his hand on my heart, then leaned his head against my back and my chest, telling me to draw deep breaths as if I had been running. He also asked me to cough for him.

When that was over, he studied my face for a long time. And it was then that I got the idea he would like

to bite me, his grin was so frightful to behold. A few moments afterward he left the house with my father, through the door that led to the shed.

Left alone, I wondered what the gentleman's questions might mean. Did he wish to engage me as his servant? That would separate me from Mattia and Cappy! Then I decided that I did not wish to enter anybody's service, especially not that of a gentleman whom I disliked.

After a while my father returned and told me to go out if I cared to. He really did not have work for me, as he had thought he would have, and I was free to go walking.

It was raining, and so I had no wish to stroll in the park. But as there was nothing to do inside this gloomy house, I went to the van to get my sheepskin coat. What was my surprise to find Mattia in the wagon! I was going to speak to him, but he put his finger to his lips, and said in a low tone, "Go and open the door of the shed. I'll steal softly out after you so that nobody'll know I was in the van."

And I couldn't get him to say another word until we were safely out on the street.

"Do you know who the man was who was calling on your father, just a short time ago?" he asked. "It was Mr. James Milligan, uncle of your friend Arthur."

I stood stock-still in the middle of the street. He seized my arm, and as we walked along he continued, "As it bored me to wander around all by myself in these awful streets, on this dreary Sunday, I came back to

sleep. I threw myself down on the cot, but I did not have my nap. Your father and a fine gentleman came into the shed shortly after I got there, and without trying to hear their conversation I missed nothing they said."

"'Solid as a rock,' said the gentleman. 'Most youngsters would have died with such a case of pneumonia, but of course he had to pull through.'

"'And how is your nephew?' your father asked.

"'Better — he'll get well this time. Three months ago the doctors gave him up, but the tender care of his dear mother won the battle. That Mrs. Milligan is certainly a wonderful woman.'

"'You can just imagine how I glued my ear to the side of the van, when I heard this name mentioned!'"

"'Well, then, if your nephew is on the mend,' your father continued, 'all your fine precautions were useless.'

"'For the time being, perhaps,' replied the gentleman, 'but I can't really imagine Arthur is going to live. It would be a miracle, and there are no such things in this world. The day he dies, I am fixed forever, since the sole heir to the estate is myself.'

"'Don't you worry,' your father said. 'I'll attend to that all right.'

"'I am counting upon you,' the gentleman replied.

"And then he went on to add some words that I did not understand, for they didn't seem to have any sense: 'At this very moment, we are seeing what can be done about it.' Then he left the shed."

On hearing Mattia's tale, my first thought was to go to my father and demand the address of Mr. James

Milligan in order to get news of Arthur and his mother. But I knew it was folly to let him realize he had been overheard. And if you wanted real information about a boy, you wouldn't go to the uncle who was impatiently waiting for him to die.

Arthur was alive. He was getting well. For the moment, this splendid news was all that I needed to make me happy. . . .

There was another happening, a few days later, that brought much joy to our weary souls. In our wanderings about the streets we came upon a band of negro minstrels, dressed in long-tailed coats, with immense white collars about their necks so that their heads looked like bouquets wrapped up in sheets of paper. Our simple music was helpless before the banjos and the rioting of these pretended black men, so we were forced to stand by and wait until their show was over and they had moved on to another quarter.

After we had watched their antics for a while, I saw one of their number, and the most extravagant of them, making signals to Mattia. I thought he was making fun of us and was trying to amuse the audience at our expense. But, to my great surprise, Mattia responded to his wave of the hand in the most friendly manner.

"Do you know him?"

"Indeed I do."

"Who is he?"

"Bob, my old friend in the Gassot circus, one of the two clowns I have told you about. It was he who taught me English."

"But you didn't know him until he waved at you."

"Of course not. When he was with Gassot, he used to put his head in the flour barrel to make it white, but he's gone and stuck it into the blacking-box."

When the minstrel show was over, Bob hunted us up, and the way he greeted Mattia showed me how fond he was of the lad. We had to separate almost immediately, he to follow his crowd, we to go in the opposite direction. But the two friends made an engagement for the following Sunday, when they could have the pleasure of talking things over. Out of love for Mattia, no doubt, Bob was good enough to show his desire to be friends with me. And soon we had a friend who, by his experience and his advice, made our life in London much easier than it had been before. He took a great liking to Cappy, too, and often he would say with envy that if he only owned a dog like that his fortune would be made. More than once he proposed to us that we join forces with him. But, if I did not wish to quit my family to return to France, to see Lise and my old friends again, I certainly could not think for a moment of following Bob across England.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IN PRISON

It sometimes seemed as if springtime never would come, the days and weeks dragged by so slowly. But finally the time was at hand when the family packed up to start off on their wanderings through rural England.

The two caravans had been repainted and loaded down with all the wares they could possibly carry, all of them to be sold during the good season of the year.

It was nothing less than marvelous what could be stuffed into the bulging vans: dress goods, knitted vests, hats, shawls, stockings, handkerchiefs, underwear, buttons, thread, scissors, razors, earrings, soaps, pomades, powders, blacking — everything you could imagine, and a hundred things you would never think of.

Finally the vans were full, the horses were bought — where and how, we did not know. There was nothing to delay our departure now. My father, who had discovered that we could earn good money with our fiddle and our harp, decided that we should go along with him and work as musicians. He told us this the night before the family left London.

"Let's take the first chance we have to go back to France," Mattia said.

"Why not just as well travel through England?"

"Because I feel it in my bones that something bad is going to happen. Besides, we have as much reason to

think Mrs. Milligan is in France as to expect to find her in England."

"Well, let's try it here first, at all events. Later we can make up our minds to something different."

. . . . Once more we were on the highways. We marched along behind the caravans, and instead of the nasty and disgusting odors of Bethnal Green we were drinking into our lungs the pure, fresh air of the country.

The very day of our departure from London I saw how the Driscolls sold the wares which cost them so little. In the early afternoon we had arrived in a big village, and the wagons were drawn up in front of the public square. One of the sides, made up of several panels, had been lowered, and the whole assortment of goods was displayed to the curiosity of chance purchasers.

"Come see our prices!" my father kept shouting. "You'll never find anything like them again. As I never pay for my wares, I am able to sell them very cheap. I'm not really selling them, anyhow — I'm giving them away. Come, look at our prices!"

And I overheard people say, as they went away after examining the cut rates on my father's goods, "Those must be stolen articles."

"Why, he practically said they were."

If they had cast their eyes in my direction, the deep flush on my face would have told them that their suspicions were the truth.

But if they did not notice my angry blush, Mattia did. And that evening he talked to me about it.

"How much longer can you stand the shame of this?" he asked.

"Don't speak of it unless you wish to add to my shame."

"I wish to get you to return to France, that's all. I keep telling you that something awful is going to happen, and before long. Some fine day the police will become curious as to how Mr. Driscoll can sell his stuff so cheap. Then what will happen?"

"Mattia, if you please —"

"Since you prefer to be blind, I must watch out for you. We are all going to be arrested soon, even if you and I are innocent. But how are we going to prove we know nothing and are not criminals? Aren't we living off the money he gets from the sale of his stolen wares?"

This was a brand-new thought to me. I felt as if some one had struck me on the head with a hammer.

"But we earn our own food," I said, arguing, not against Mattia, but against that hateful thought.

"We surely do," responded Mattia, "and yet we're associated with people who do not earn their daily bread honestly. We'll be sent up, just as surely as they will be. And, when we sit in prison, who'll look for your family, then? Your real family, I mean. And we both fear that Mr. James Milligan is trying to do harm to Arthur. If we're in jail, who's going to warn the boy's mother? Let's get out of here while we still have the chance."

"Let me have a few more days before I decide, and then I'll promise to let you know definitely."

"Hurry is all I've got to say. The ogre in the fairy

tale smelled the blood of an Englishman. As for me, I scent danger right ahead of us."

Fate took a hand in my affairs and did for me what I did not dare to do myself.

Several weeks had already passed since we left London, and we had come to a city in the suburbs of which the races were about to open. My father, instead of settling down near the race track, had established his vans in the town itself, where he thought business would be better.

We reached the town early in the day, and as Mattia and I had nothing to do with the sale of the goods we wandered out to the race track, which was situated just a short distance away on a heath. As we expected, we found hundreds of people gathering for the fair which accompanied the race meeting. Numerous tents were already set up all around the course, and its location was marked by little pillars of smoke, where food was being cooked over camp fires. Jugglers, gypsies, strolling peddlers, musicians, gamblers, were everywhere about.

As we were passing a campfire over which a kettle was hanging, we ran across our friend Bob, the negro minstrel. He was delighted to meet us here. It seemed he had come to the races with two of his brother artists to give exhibitions of strength and sleight-of-hand. But the musicians upon whom they had counted had backed out at the last moment, so that their performance next day was almost sure to be a failure of the most awful sort. If we only would, we might do Bob and his friends a great favor by taking the place of the missing orchestra.

We'd share and share alike, the five of us, or Cappy could come in for a stake, too.

Of course we promised at once to join in and agreed to be there next day in good time.

But when we returned to the city and I told my father of our arrangement, a difficulty arose at once.

"I need Cappy tomorrow," he said, "so you can't take him."

These words made me very restless. Were they going to make use of the dog to achieve some new villainy? My father at once relieved me of this worry.

"Cappy has a delicate sense of hearing," he explained. "He will be a good watch dog. I want him to stand guard by the caravans, for in all this crowd and confusion they will surely try to steal from us. So you go along with Bob by yourselves, and if your work lasts until late into the night, as it probably may, you can look us up at the Big Oak Inn, where we are going to sleep. It's my intention to leave here at nightfall tomorrow."

We had passed the previous night in the Big Oak, an inn situated two or three miles out from town on a lonely and forbidding road. The place was kept by a couple whose faces did not inspire one with trust. Nothing would be easier for us than to find this inn at night, for the road to it was straight ahead. The only nuisance about staying there was the long walk after a hard day's work.

But there was no objection that could be made, for my father never allowed his family to question his acts. The next day, therefore, after tying Cappy to the axle

of the caravan he was to guard, Mattia and I went out to the race course.

We began to play the moment we got there and kept it up without resting until evening. The tips of my fingers pained me as if they had been pricked by thousands of thorns, and Mattia had blown so long into his cornet that he had no breath left. But it was our duty to play if the skies fell; Bob and his friends did not spare themselves, so we could not give in. Our performances lasted until midnight and later. Then a big bar of iron that they used in their exhibitions of strength fell on Mattia's foot, and at first we were afraid his limb had been crushed. Luckily, the wound was not a severe one, and except for several bad bruises his foot would soon be as good as new again. But Mattia could not walk on it.

What was there to do?

It was decided that my friend should spend the night with Bob in his wagon, while I went on alone to the Big Oak Inn. For, of course, we had to know where the Driscolls were going the following day. So, although I was nearly dead with weariness, I walked away quickly and after a terrible tramp came to the tavern, but, try as I would, I could find no trace of our caravans. There were two or three wretched carts covered with cloth tarpaulins, a big wooden shed, and two closed trucks from which there issued the cries of wild beasts as I drew near. But nowhere to be seen were the gaudily painted vans of the Driscoll family.

In walking around the corner of the tavern I saw a

light shining through the transom above a door, and I thought somebody must still be stirring in spite of the lateness of the hour. I knocked, and the mean-faced landlord opened the door himself, turning the flare of his lantern full in my face. I saw he recognized me, but instead of letting me pass him he thrust his lantern quickly behind him, and cast stealthy glances all about. He listened in silence for several seconds. Then he said, "Your caravans have gone. Your father left word you should join him at once in Lewes, even if you had to walk all night. Good luck to you!" whereupon he shut the door in my face, without another word.

Now, I did not know where Lewes was located, and even if I had, I could not have gone there right away without abandoning Mattia. So I was compelled to return to the race track, worn out in body and soul though I was. An hour and a half later I was fast asleep on a good truss of straw in Bob's wagon.

A few hours of deep and dreamless slumber restored my strength, and I awoke ready to depart for Lewes the moment that Mattia, who was still dozing, could go with me. I was watching Bob crouched down on all fours and blowing as hard as he could on the fire under the kettle when to my surprise, on looking up, I beheld Cappy being led toward us by a policeman.

What could this mean?

The instant Cappy caught sight of me, he jerked so hard at his leash that it flew from the hand of the policeman. In a few leaps the dog had reached my side and jumped into my arms.

"That beast is yours, isn't he?" the official asked.

"Of course he is."

"In that case, you're under arrest."

He grasped my arm in a cruel grip and pulled me toward him. The words and the gesture of the constable caused Bob to spring to his feet. He confronted the fellow.

"What are you arresting that lad for?" he asked.

"Are you his brother?"

"No, I'm not, but I'm his friend."

"A man and a boy got into St. George's Church last night by means of a ladder. They had this dog with them to give the alarm if their thieving was discovered. They were discovered in the act of robbery and had to make such a quick get-away that they left the dog behind them. With the dog in my hands, I knew I could catch the thieves, and I've already got one of them. Where is your father now?"

I was so overcome, you could have knocked me down with a feather.

Mattia, who had heard all that had been said and done, came limping out of the cart and hurried to my side.

"Tell him that I'm not guilty," I said to Bob. "I didn't leave here until one o'clock this morning. I went to the Big Oak Inn, where I talked a minute with the landlord, and then I came straight back."

Bob translated what I said to the official, but this person did not appear to be much impressed.

"It was a quarter past one when the church was robbed," he stated. "This lad left here, he says, at one

or a few minutes past. He could have been at the church by a quarter past if he ran all the way."

"I can swear he didn't do it!" cried Bob.

The policeman shrugged his shoulders. "We'll give the judge a chance to hear all about it," he said. "Meanwhile, I'll take this lad along with me."

Mattia gave me a final desperate hug. "Keep up your courage," he whispered to me, "we won't desert you."

"You take care of Cappy," I said to Mattia in French.

But the constable understood what I said.

"No, you don't!" he objected. "I'll look after the dog. He found one of the thieves for me, now he must get me the other one."

Fast in the policeman's grasp, I had to pass by the rows of curious people who had been attracted to the scene. They did not pursue me with jeers and threats, as had been the case when I was arrested in France. For this crowd was not a group of peasants, but of individuals who lived at war with the law: jugglers, barkeepers, gypsies, and tramps.

Nor was the jail that received me a make-believe lock-up, like the one Mattia and I had found strewn with onions. It was a real prison, with iron bars at its window, the very sight of which killed any budding idea of escape. The sole furniture of the cell was a bench and a hammock.

I sank down upon the bench and remained there for a long time, reflecting upon my sad plight, but too frightened and tired to put two and two together.

What could Mattia and Bob do to help me escape? I got up and walked over to the grated window; the bars

were set far into the stone of the sills. I examined the walls; they were three feet thick. The ground beneath was paved with great stones, the door to the cell was covered with a sheet of steel. Escape was out of the question.

Would it be possible for me to prove my innocence in spite of Cappy's presence in the church? My friends at the race track were witnesses to prove I could not have been at the St. George's Church at a quarter after one. If they could establish this alibi for me, then I was saved, no matter what the mute testimony of poor Cappy might indicate.

Early that afternoon the jailer entered my cell with food.

"When will the judge examine me?" I asked him.

My keeper did not seem to be a bad sort of man, and he answered kindly enough that I would have my hearing next day. But my question had evidently put another one into his mind, for he asked me, "Tell me, how did you get into the church?"

I burst out at once with the most frantic protestations of innocence, to all of which the jailer replied with a calm grin. Then, as I continued to insist I had not been near the church, he turned to leave me.

"They are wicked fellows, these street kids from London," he muttered as if to himself. And he banged the steel door behind him.

His disbelief in my honesty affected me terribly. If the keeper thought me guilty, what chance had I to convince the judge?

The next morning the jailer came into my cell carrying a pitcher of water and a basin. He told me to give myself a good wash, if I felt so inclined, because I was soon to appear before the magistrate, and a cleanly appearance was sometimes the best defense an accused person could offer. When my toilet was completed, he told me to follow him. I marched by his side, and after we had passed through several long halls we finally came to a small door which he opened.

"Enter," he said.

The courtroom was fairly large, with a high ceiling and tall windows. It was divided into two inclosures, one for the tribunal, the other for spectators.

On an elevated platform the judge was seated. Before him but lower down sat three other officials of the court. Close by the stand to which I was shown there stood a personage in robe and wig who, I was told, was my lawyer.

How did I come to have a lawyer? Where did he come from? Who had sent him? I could not imagine.

In another inclosed stand I caught sight of Bob, his two fellow performers, the landlord of the Big Oak, and several other people whom I did not know. In another part of the room I recognized the policeman who had arrested me, and around him were some more people. These, I guessed rightly, were witnesses of one sort and another. In the inclosure reserved for the public there was not a vacant seat. Right by the railing I saw Mattia. Our glances met and clung for an instant, and I felt my courage reviving.

The prosecuting attorney presented the case in a short speech: There had been a robbery committed in St. George's Church. The thieves, a man and a boy, had entered by a ladder through a broken window. They had a dog along with them to warn them of danger. A late passer-by — it was then a quarter past one in the morning — had been surprised to see a dim light in the church. He had listened and had heard movements. He had at once awakened the sexton. Several men had hurried to the church, but the dog had begun to bark, and while they were forcing the door, the frightened thieves had made their escape through the broken window. They left the dog to his fate. This dog had been led to the race track by the policeman Jerry, whose zeal and intelligence the prosecuting attorney could not praise too highly. At the track the dog had recognized his master, who was none other than the accused at present on the stand. As to the second thief, they were already on his trail.

Then the judge, without turning in my direction and almost as if he were talking to himself, asked me my name, my age, and my profession.

I answered in English that I was called Francis Driscoll, and that I lived with my parents in London, at Red Lion Court, Bethnal Green. Then I asked if I might go on in French, as I had been brought up in France, and had been in England only for a few months.

"Don't try to deceive me," said the judge harshly. "I understand French myself."

Thereafter I told my story in my native tongue, and explained how impossible it was for me to have been in the

church at one o'clock, for at that hour I had been at the race track, and at half past two at the Big Oak Inn.

"And how do you explain the presence of your dog in the church, then?" the judge asked.

"I don't explain it, for I don't understand it. In the morning I had tied him beneath one of our caravans."

I did not like to say any more than that, for I did not wish to offer any testimony against my father. Mattia made me a frenzied sign to go on and explain further, but I was silent.

Then they called a witness and made him swear upon the Bible to speak the whole truth without hatred and without passion.

This was a fat gentleman, short, and with an unspeakably majestic air, in spite of his red face and his purplish nose. It was the sexton of St. George's parish.

He began by telling a long tale of how worried and scandalized he had been when awakened by the news that there were robbers in the church. His first idea had been that somebody was playing a practical joke on him. Still, he had dressed with such haste that he had torn off two buttons from his vest. Then he had run madly — he had torn open the door of the church, and he had discovered whom? Or, perhaps, he should rather say what? A dog.

I had nothing to say to this story, of course. But my lawyer, who up to this minute had spoken no word, now rose, set his wig more firmly on his head, smoothed his robe down over his shoulders, and started his part of the game.

"Who shut the door of the church last night?" he asked.

"I did," answered the sexton, "as my duty requires me to do."

"Are you sure of it?"

"When I do a thing, I'm sure of what I'm doing."

"But suppose you don't do a thing."

"Then I'm sure I haven't done it."

"Very fine! Then you can swear that you did not lock the dog in question inside the church?"

"If the dog had been there, I should have seen it."

"Is your eyesight good?"

"As good as the next man's."

"Then why did you walk right into a calf that was hanging, with its belly slit open, in front of the butcher shop, some three months ago?"

"I do not see the importance of such a question when addressed to a man of my character," cried the sexton, blue in the face.

"Will you, however, be so extremely kind as to answer my question if I think it important?"

"All right, then! I did run against an animal which was clumsily displayed before a butcher shop."

"Because you had not seen it, I suppose?"

"I was wrapped up in my thoughts."

"Were you coming from dinner when you closed the door of the church?"

"Certainly I was."

"And when you walked right inside of the calf, were you also coming from dinner?"

"But —"

"You claim that you had not dined?"

"Of course not. I had just had dinner."

"Did you drink pale beer or strong beer with your meal?"

"Strong beer."

"How many pints?"

"Two."

"Not more than that?"

"Three, perhaps."

"Not four pints? Not six pints?"

"I rarely drink as many as six."

"Do you take a toddy after dinner?"

"Sometimes."

"Do you like it strong or weak?"

"Well — not too weak."

"How many glasses of toddy do you generally drink?"

"That depends."

"Are you ready to swear under oath that you do not sometimes take three or even four glasses of toddy?"

As the sexton grew more and more blue in the face, and finally refused to answer, the lawyer started to resume his seat, saying, "My examination of the witness is sufficient to prove that the dog may have been locked up in the church by the witness who, after dinner, cannot see well even if a calf confronts him, because he is so wrapped up in his — thoughts! I have learned, your honor, all that I wished to know."

If I had dared, I should have kissed my lawyer, I felt sure that I was saved.

After the sexton was through, the court heard the testimony of those who were with him when he entered the church. But they had seen nothing further than the open window through which the thieves had escaped.

Then my witnesses were heard: Bob, his fellow performers, and the innkeeper, all of whom stated how my time had been employed at the hour of the robbery. But there was one point that was not cleared up, and that was a most important one — just exactly what minute it was when I left the race track.

When the trial was over, the judge asked if I had anything to say, warning me that I might preserve silence if I wished. I responded that I was innocent and relied entirely upon the justice of the court. Then the judge had the record read of all the testimonies that had been made. Then he declared that I should be returned to prison, there to await the action of the grand jury as to whether I should be held to the assizes or not.

The assizes!

I fell back on my bench. Alas! Why had I not followed Mattia's hint and told all I knew about the Driscolls!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BOB

I had not been back in my cell very long before I learned the reason why I had not been acquitted. The judge was expecting the arrest of the thieves who had robbed the church, and he wished to learn whether I was their accomplice. The police were on their track, so the prosecuting attorney had said. So I was to endure the shame and disgrace of appearing at the assizes, side by side with my father and my brother in the prisoners' dock.

Late that afternoon I heard the notes of a cornet, and I recognized Mattia's way of playing. The good lad! He was trying to let me know that they were thinking of me and on watch. Other sounds were joined to the notes of the cornet; there was the shuffling of feet and much talking, so I knew that Mattia and Bob were giving a performance as close to the wall beneath my window as they could get.

Why had they chosen just this spot? Because it was a favorable place to earn good money, or did they wish to give me a message of some sort? Suddenly I heard a clear voice, Mattia's, call out in French, "Tomorrow morning at dawn!" Right after that, he made the biggest noise he could on his cornet.

It required no great effort of mind to understand that Mattia did not intend these words for his English audience. It was not so easy to determine just what the

message signified, but one fact stood forth clear and exact: next morning at daybreak I must be awake and ready for anything. Until then I should have to exercise such patience as I could.

The second it grew dark, I climbed into my hammock and strove to go to sleep. I heard one hour after another struck by the clocks in the neighborhood, but finally I sank into deep and peaceful slumber. When I awoke, it was still night. Stars glistened in the dark blue of the sky, the whole world was buried in silence; doubtless, day was still far off. Soon a clock struck the hour of three. I had awakened too soon. Nevertheless, I did not dare doze off again, and, besides, I doubt whether I could have done so; I was too feverish, too nervous.

I got down from my hammock and went to lean against the wall. I kept my eyes fixed on the window. After a long while it seemed to me that the star I was watching lost its brightness and that the sky was taking on a new but feeble white.

Day was drawing near. Somewhere a cock crowed.

I opened the window so carefully that it did not creak.

The stars grew gradually paler, and the fresh chill of the morning made me shiver, but I stuck to my place of lookout, listening and straining my eyes, ignorant of what might happen. A great white film of mist mounted into the sky, and on the earth below all objects began to assume more distinct shapes. It was the hour of which Mattia had spoken. I held my breath so that I could listen better. I could hear my heart throbbing wildly in my breast.

Then I thought I heard a scratching sound against the wall but, as I had heard no footsteps, I decided that I must have been mistaken. The scratching became louder, a head appeared above the wall — it was Bob's.

He saw me with my face glued against the iron bars. "Sh-h-h!" he whispered warningly.

And with one hand he motioned me back from the window. I did not understand why, but I obeyed. Then he put a shining tube to his lips, which I quickly recognized as a pea-shooter. He took a deep breath and blew. A small white pellet sailed through the air, entered the cell window, and fell at my feet. Instantly Bob's head disappeared from the wall, and I heard nothing further.

I fairly pounced on the ball. It was tissue paper rolled up tight, with a large grain of shot in its center to lend it weight. It was not yet light enough to see what was written on this paper, even after I had carefully unwound it and smoothed it out. I had to wait for day.

I shut my window and lay down again in my hammock, holding the paper in my hand. When at last a pink light bathed the wall opposite the panes of glass, I read:

You are going to be transferred to the county prison tomorrow. You will travel in a second-class compartment with a policeman. Sit down close to the door by which you enter the train. At the end of three-quarters of an hour — keep good track of the time! — your train will slow down as it approaches a junction. Then open your door and jump. When you hit the ground, climb the slope at your left. We'll be there with a cart and a good horse to carry you off. Don't be afraid — jump far out and face forward when you let go.

Saved! I was not going to appear at the assizes. I should not have to witness what happened there. How fine of Bob to help Mattia so! For, alone, my little friend could not have carried out the plan.

I read the note through again: "Three-quarters of an hour slope at your left jump far out and face forward." I'd jump, fast enough — jump if it killed me! For better die than be condemned as a thief.

There was one sad note in my hymn of joy: How about Cappy?

But I discarded the thought as soon as it presented itself to my mind. For I knew Mattia too well to believe that he would ever abandon Cappy.

I chewed my tissue paper into a pulp and swallowed it.

Next day, in the afternoon, a policeman whom I did not know came into my cell and told me to follow him. I noted with satisfaction that he was a man about fifty years of age, and not too agile in his movements.

Things turned out just as Mattia had written, and when the train had started I was placed next to the door by which I had entered. I was riding backward, the policeman sat across from me. We were alone in the compartment.

"Do you speak English?" he asked me.

"A little," I answered. "But do not talk too fast."

"Well, then, my lad, I'm going to give you a bit of advice. Don't try to be more cunning than the law is — confess. You tell me the truth about this church robbery and I'll give you a crown. You will see how much easier a little money will make your stay in jail."

I was on the point of saying that I had nothing to confess, but I thought this might make the policeman angry, so I held my tongue.

"Think it over for a while," he continued, "and when you get to jail and find that my advice to you is good, send for me. Don't go and tell your secret to the first comer, but choose somebody like me who takes an interest in your case. You'll find me ready to help."

I said that I would follow his suggestion.

"Just ask for Dolphin. You can remember that?"

"Yes, sir."

I was leaning against the door, the sash of which was open. I asked him if I might look out at the passing scenery. He said I could look all I wanted to. He was not afraid that anything would happen. The train was speeding along at a great rate.

The cold air that blew in through the window swept straight against my companion. He drew away from the door and sat in the center of the compartment. My left hand slipped gently forward and turned the handle of the door, my right hand kept the door from blowing open.

The minutes sped by. The engine whistled sharply and slackened its speed. My moment had come. Quickly I thrust the door open and sprang as far out from the train as I could. I was thrown into the ditch. Luckily, I had stretched my hands out before me. They struck the grassy slope and saved me from serious injury. But the shock had been so great that I rolled over on the ground senseless.

When I came to my senses, I thought for a moment that I was somehow still on the train, for I felt that I was being carried along rapidly, and I could hear the rolling of wheels beneath me. I was lying on a bed of straw.

Strangely enough, my cheeks were wet. A gentle and warm kiss grazed my forehead. I opened my eyes. A dog, a villainous yellow animal, was leaning over me and licking me with its tongue. My gaze met that of Mattia, who was kneeling down beside me.

"You are saved," he said, pushing the dog aside and giving me a happy hug.

"Where are we?"

"In a cart. Bob is driving us."

"Well, how are you getting on?" Bob asked, turning around. "Move your arms and legs, and let's see."

I stretched out on my truss of straw and did what he asked.

"Good!" cried Mattia. "Nothing broken."

"But tell me what happened."

"You jumped from the train as I had told you to, but the shock of hitting the ground stunned you and you rolled into the ditch. When you didn't appear, Bob climbed down the hill while I held the horse, and he came back up with you in his arms. We thought you were dead. Gee! How frightened we were!"

"What did the policeman do?"

"He stuck right along with the train — it didn't stop. Either he was asleep, or the emergency signal didn't work."

I knew enough for the present. I looked about me and saw the yellow dog regarding me tenderly with eyes that looked like Cappy's.

"Oh, what's become of dear old Cappy?" I asked.

Before Mattia could reply, the yellow dog had jumped on me, and was licking me and whining.

"Why, that's Cappy there," Mattia cried, laughing. "We dyed him yellow, so he wouldn't be recognized after we stole him from policeman Jerry. Jerry may be intelligent, as the prosecuting attorney said, but he doesn't know enough to hurt him. For he let us steal Cappy right from under his nose."

"And where are we headed for now?"

"Littlehampton, a small seaport not far away, where Bob has a brother who commands a freighter that makes voyages to France to bring back butter and eggs from Normandy. If we arrive safely in France, Remi, we'll owe it all to Bob. He had the idea of your jumping from the train, of the pea-shooter and the message, of borrowing the horse and cart from his friends at the fair. It's he who got the boat to carry us over the Channel. If we ever took a steamship, the police would arrest us."

"It's a wonderful thing to have such friends, Mattia! And how is your foot?"

"Better, I guess. Anyway, I haven't had time to think about it, so it must be mending."

We snuggled 'way down under the straw and the tarpaulin. The horse's gait never flagged.

"Are you afraid?" Mattia asked me.

"Yes and no. I am very much afraid of being caught,

but I doubt if they do overtake us. But it seems to me that my running off this way is almost the same as confessing that I am guilty — that's what worries me most."

"Bob and I thought of that, but it seemed to us that anything was better than standing trial. Even if they acquitted you, it would be a bad thing to have been in jail with thieves."

We made as good time as we could on the road, for we all felt sure that, the moment the train stopped, the policeman would lose no time in picking up our trail. The road we were traveling was deserted. From time to time only, we passed carts, but none overtook us. The villages through which we flew at top speed were silent, and rare were the windows that showed a light.

It was therefore not so much to hide ourselves that we crouched beneath our covers as to protect ourselves from the cold. For some time a stiff breeze had been blowing. When we touched our lips with the tongue, we got a taste of salt — we were nearing the ocean. Soon we caught sight of a light which flashed toward us at regular intervals. It was a lighthouse. We had arrived at our destination.

Bob halted his horse, and then, driving it slowly into a lonely side road, he gave us the reins to hold and told us to stay there quietly until he came back. He jumped to the ground, saying that he was going to find his brother and ask him whether it was safe for him to take us on the boat with him to France.

I confess the absence of Bob seemed to me a long one. We said nothing, and we could hear the surf pound-

ing on the beach not far away, with a monotonous sound that increased our feelings of strangeness and fear.

At last we heard the sound of footsteps on the road ahead. Bob was coming back, but not alone. When he got closer, we saw who was with him. It was a sailor clad in oilskins and a stocking cap.

"Here is my brother," Bob said. "He's willing to take you boys along with him. He'll show you on board. We'll have to say good-by right here, for there's no use of any one's seeing us together."

I tried to thank Bob properly. But he shut me off and gave me a hearty handshake.

"Don't let's waste any words in being polite," he said. "Every fellow is glad enough to help when his turn comes. We'll see each other some day."

We stumbled along behind Bob's brother through the quiet streets of the village. After some winding about in the dark, we came out upon the docks and met the full force of the ocean breeze. Without saying a word, Bob's brother pointed out a sloop-rigged boat, and a few minutes later we were aboard. He told us to climb down into the small cabin.

"We're not off for another two hours," he said. "Lie low and don't make any noise."

When he had locked the door of the cabin behind him, Mattia and I gave each other a silent hug. We were no longer afraid of the future.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE "SWAN"

After the departure of Bob's brother, the ship was as quiet as the grave. The only noise we heard without was the sound of the wind in the rigging and the rush of the water against the keel.

But after a long interval life on the sloop seemed to awake with a sudden start — footsteps resounded upon the bridge, ropes were cast off, pulleys creaked, chains rattled, the capstan was manned, sail was made, the rudder post groaned. The boat careened to the left and began to rock. We were under way, and saved.

The sloop began to pitch and roll heavily in the trough of the sea. Poor Mattia! He was in for a bad time.

"Suppose I am seasick, what of it?" he asked bravely. "You're saved, aren't you? So let the old sea dance."

. . . . The long next day passed somehow, and I put in my time between the cabin, where I nursed Mattia, and the bridge, where I took lessons in seamanship from the captain. It was a happy moment for me when, talking with Bob's brother, I saw him stretch his hand out toward the southwest and point at a high white column outlined against a deep-blue background.

"Barfleur," he told me.

I ran hastily down to the cabin to inform Mattia we were in sight of France. As it was late when we tied up to the dock there, our host insisted on our spending the

night on board. So it was the following morning that we parted from the generous captain, after thanking him the very best we knew how.

"If you ever want to skip back to England," he declared, as he gave our hands a final shake of farewell, "just remember that the staunch sloop 'Eclipse' leaves this dock every Tuesday. You're welcome to a passage on her at any time."

It was a gracious invitation, but Mattia and I were not inclined to jump at it, for both of us had reasons enough not to cross the Channel for a good long time to come.

Thus we disembarked in France with nothing but our instruments and the clothes on our backs to show for the long stay on English soil. Mattia had been careful to guard my harp, which I had left in Bob's tent the night I walked to Big Oak Inn. As to our knapsacks, they and their contents had been left behind in the caravan of the Driscoll family. All this was a nuisance, for we had to take up our wandering life again without clean shirts or stockings, to say nothing of our beloved map of France.

But, luckily, we had in our pockets the profits from our day at the fair with Bob, and twelve francs of Mattia's savings into the bargain — a total of almost forty francs. My little comrade had wished to give this money to Bob, to pay him for the expenses my escape had cost him, but he refused to accept a penny.

First, we replaced our missing garments and bought a map. Then we turned to consider the next matter.

"Which way shall we go?" I asked.

"Say, I have an idea," answered Mattia. "Let's follow some stream, a river or a canal, for if Arthur is still only a little ill Mrs. Milligan will want him to be back on the 'Swan,' floating down some river or canal."

"But what will we do meanwhile about seeing the Acquins — Lise, Alexis, Benjamin, Etiennette?"

"We can look them up while we're hunting for Mrs. Milligan. Take out your old map, now, and find the nearest river."

I obeyed instructions. The river nearest us was the Seine.

"Seine it is, then," cried Mattia, cheerfully. "And here's the way we'll go about our work: We'll ask all the sailors and freighters along the river whether they've set eyes on the 'Swan.' From what I've heard you say, it doesn't look like any other barge ever built. And if we don't find it on the Seine, we'll try all the other streams in France. And we'll strike it, sooner or later."

Now that our own plans had been settled, it was high time that we were attending to Cappy. No yellow dog could be my dog. We bought some soft soap and scrubbed him thoroughly in the first brook we came to, each one taking turns until his strength was gone.

But the dye in which Bob had steeped Cappy was of the most lasting kind. It looked as if it would require many baths, and numerous soapings, weeks, perhaps, and even months, to get Cappy back to his natural color. Happily, Normandy is the country of water, and we never let a day pass without bathing our dog.

When from the top of the wooded hills, after a hard day's tramping, we turned the corner of a shady road, Mattia caught sight of the Seine describing a great lazy curve down below us.

"Just make up your mind that Mrs. Milligan is with her sick boy right here on the Seine," my friend said.

"That's what we are going to find out in the next few moments," I replied. And as soon as might be, I was talking with the people of the Norman village by the riverside.

It was soon evident that no such barge as the "Swan" had ever passed this place, unless it had gone by during the night, which was not very likely.

We kept up our fire of questions, without being discouraged but without any special hope of success, for the next five weeks. Our progress along the Seine was, of course, much slower than it would otherwise have been, as we had to stop several times a day to earn our daily bread.

Happily, when we arrived at Charenton, we learned that we must keep following the Seine, instead of branching off and going down the Marne River. For, when I asked my everlasting questions regarding the "Swan," I was promptly told that such a boat as I described had passed that way long before — a large pleasure barge with an odd-looking veranda built upon it.

Mattia was so happy at our news that he did a dance on the dock. Then, suddenly halting his jig, he tucked his fiddle under his chin and played quite madly a triumphal march. Meanwhile I asked many questions of the sailor

who had seen the boat and found that it was impossible to doubt the truth of his statement: Two months before, the "Swan" had gone up the river.

Two months! That was a big head-start, but what difference did it make? While we had only our own legs to carry us on, and they had the stout legs of two good horses, still, if we stuck to our path, we should overtake them sooner or later. Time did not count one way or the other. The great, the remarkable fact was that we were finally on the right track.

"I told you so! I told you so!" chanted Mattia.

I had been afraid to admit to my chum how high my own hopes of finding Arthur and his mother had been, for I had hardly dared confess them to myself. There was now no reason why we should stop and bother people with questions. The "Swan" was before us; all we had to do was follow the Seine.

After I don't remember how many days, we reached Montereau, and there we found that the barge had left the stream we were skirting and turned off into the river Yonne. We were told the boat was carrying an English lady and a sick boy stretched upon a cot.

We turned into the new direction, and from now on we were with every step drawing nearer to Lise. When we reached Dreuzy, my little sister herself could give us news of those we were seeking.

We hardly stopped to give a single performance, and therefore our receipts dwindled to almost nothing and we were forced to live upon our capital of forty francs.

"Let's hurry to catch that boat," Mattia would urge.

And I was quite of the same mind. No matter how long the hike, we never complained of fatigue when night came; on the contrary, we were only the more determined to get an earlier start the following morning.

"Wake me up, remember!" Mattia would say, for he loved to sleep. And when I roused him, he was never slow in jumping to his feet.

To save money, we had reduced our living expenses, and when the weather grew hot Mattia declared he must give up eating meat, for it was unhealthful in the dog days. We got along on bread and hard-boiled eggs, with perhaps a touch of butter. And all this in spite of the fact that no one was fonder of good things to eat than was my small chum.

"I hope Mrs. Milligan still has that cook who made the dandy jelly tarts," he would sometimes sigh. "Apricot tarts must be wonderfully good."

"Didn't you ever taste them?"

"I've eaten apple dumplings, but I never got closer to apricot tarts than the outside of a baker's window. What are those white things they stick all over the yellow jam?"

"Almonds."

"Oh!" And Mattia stretched his mouth wide open, as if he were swallowing a whole tart in one mouthful.

At every lock we passed now we got news of our boat, for navigation on this canal was not very active, and all the people had noticed the strange barge because it looked so little like any other they had seen. They all spoke of the sweet English lady and the little boy who was almost

always lying in the same place on the deck, in the shelter of a veranda adorned with foliage and flowers. Sometimes, though, the young boy would stand on his feet.

So Arthur's health must be improving.

We kept approaching Dreuzy. First it was two days off, then one, and then but a few hours. At last we saw the woods where we had played with Lise the previous autumn, and then the cottage of Aunt Catherine itself.

We no longer walked; we ran. Cappy recognized the house as well as we did, and dashed on ahead. He was going to tell Lise that we were coming. But, after all, it was not Lise that came out of the cottage; it was a woman whom we did not know.

"Where is Madame Suriot?" I asked.

The woman stared at us a moment before answering, as if she considered our question a rather silly one.

"She isn't here any more," she said, after a while. "She has gone to Egypt."

Mattia and I nearly fainted. We did not know exactly where on the earth's surface Egypt might be, but we had a vague notion it was far away across the sea.

"And do you know about Lise?"

"I certainly do. She went off on a boat with an English lady."

Lise on the "Swan"! Were we dreaming? It was the voice of the woman that brought me back to the world of reality.

"Are you Remi?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well, when Suriot was drowned —"

"Drowned!"

"Oh, I see you haven't heard how Suriot fell from his boat and when he was swept under he caught on a projecting spike. Such things happen in our business only too often. And poor Catherine, of course, didn't know what to do, for she was offered a position as nurse with a family that was going to Egypt, but she couldn't decide what to do with Lise. And it was just at that moment that an English lady halted one evening at the lock with her invalid son. And the two women had a long talk.

"Now the English lady was seeking a child to play with her son, because he got awfully tired of being all alone on the barge, and she promised Catherine to take the best of care of Lise if she might have charge of the child. She said she would bring her up, pay doctors to cure her and make her speak, and arrange for her future. Before Lise went away, she wanted her aunt to tell me what I was to say to Remi when he came to look for her. And I have done so."

I was so astounded that I did not find a single word to say. But Mattia never lost his head.

"And where is the English lady now?" he asked.

"In the south of France or in Switzerland. Lise promised to write me a letter so you could know her address, but I haven't received it yet."

CHAPTER XL

THE FINE BABY CLOTHES TOLD THE TRUTH

While I was still standing there speechless, Mattia did what I should have done. "We thank you, Madame," he said. And, giving me a gentle tug, he drew me away from the house.

"Come on!" he said. "Forward march! We are now on our way not only to Mrs. Milligan and Arthur, but to Lise as well. How beautifully things are turning out for us! We should have lost time by staying at Dreuzy, but now we can plunge straight ahead. The wind has changed — we've had enough bad luck, now for good!"

And so, once again, we turned our faces to the horizon. And we did not rest, except to sleep and to earn the few pennies needed to pay for our living. We went down the Saône to Lyons, and there for a while we were met by a really serious difficulty, for in the great crowd of boats which pass this city, both on the Saône and the Rhone, the "Swan" might have swept by unseen. But, after long questioning of the fishermen, the sailors, and the stevedores on the docks, we learned with certainty that Mrs. Milligan had gone on to Switzerland. So we took up our march with renewed happiness.

"From Switzerland one goes to Italy," said Mattia. "And if in running after Lise we get to Lucca, how glad my sister Christina will be!"

Poor old Mattia! He was hunting those whom I

loved, and yet I had done nothing to bring him a step nearer his own people.

One day we learned that we were but six weeks behind the "Swan." And yet, as we studied the map, it did not seem possible that we should catch up with the barge before it got to Switzerland, for I did not know at that time that the river Rhone was not navigable all the way to Geneva. From the first, then, we had expected that Mrs. Milligan would travel the whole distance by boat.

So what was my happiness and my surprise, when we came one day to a small town that lay on both sides of the river and was joined together by a suspension bridge, to see the "Swan" in the distance! We started to run like good fellows!

But when we reached the barge, we saw at once that something was wrong. The boat was deserted, everything on it was barred up, the flowers were gone from the veranda. What had happened? We were afraid to guess.

In a moment we had found the man who had been left in charge of the deserted boat. He told us that the English lady, with two children and a maid, had gone on to Switzerland in a carriage. The other servants had followed with the luggage.

We breathed again.

"And where is this lady just now?" asked Mattia.

"She is spending the summer in a country house on the shores of Lake Geneva near Vevey. I don't know just where."

All aboard for Vevey! We bought a map of Switzerland at Geneva and located the town on it. It was good to know that Mrs. Milligan was no longer running away from us but had settled down for the summer in the country. At last we could count on finding her.

We reached our goal with three pennies in our pockets and no soles whatever on our shoes.

Now, Vevey is not the little village that we had at first imagined it to be; it is a regular city. As to our asking where to find an English lady with a sick son and a dumb daughter, such a thing would simply be absurd. For there are almost as many English people there as there would be in an English bathing resort close to London.

The best way therefore seemed to be for us to visit all the nice places which accommodated guests. There was no difficulty in our doing this, for we only had to give our concerts in all the different streets. It took us only one day to carry out this plan and to earn a pretty sum of money, but nowhere did we find the ones we were in search of.

Then we visited one after the other all the suburbs of Vevey, still with hope strong in our hearts, for what success we did not have one day would come another.

One afternoon we were giving a concert out in the open road, having nothing before us in the way of visible audience but an iron-barred gate, and behind us only a stone wall to which we had paid no attention. I had sung at the top of my voice the first verses of my Neapolitan ballad and was already beginning the second stanza, when

suddenly behind us there was a weak voice singing the words along with me. Whose voice could that be?

"Is it Arthur?" asked Mattia.

"No, it's a voice I never heard before."

Cappy, however, was uttering muffled barks of delight and was giving vent to his pleasurable excitement by jumping at the wall.

"Who is singing?" I cried, bursting with curiosity.

"O Remi!"

My name was the only answer to my question. Mattia and I gaped open-mouthed at each other. And while we were standing there like stupids, I caught sight of a handkerchief fluttering in the breeze at the end of the wall, above a close-clipped hedge. It was not until we rounded this hedgerow that we saw whose hand it was that waved the signal to us: Lise.

At last we had reached her! And not her alone, but Mrs. Milligan and Arthur.

"Who was that singing?" Mattia and I called to her before we reached her side.

"I," she answered.

The miracle had happened. Lise was singing and talking!

It is true that I had been told a thousand times that Lise would some day regain her voice under stress of a strong emotion, but I had never quite believed it.

And now the thing was true! It was when she heard me singing, me whom she had feared forever lost to her, that she had experienced the shock which gave her back her powers of expression.

I was so full of joy at this thought that I was obliged to cling to a bough of the hedge to keep from swaying.

This was, however, no moment to lose control of myself.

"Where is Mrs. Milligan?" I cried. "And Arthur?"

Lise moved her lips and tried to answer me. But only sounds I could not understand were uttered by her mouth. Then, in her impatience, she used the sign language to tell me, for her tongue had been too long unused to forming words.

Obedient to the waving of her hands, I looked farther down in the garden, and there I saw a wheel chair being slowly pushed along by an attendant. Arthur was stretched out in the chair, his mother was walking behind him, and — I bent forward to see more clearly — Mr. James Milligan! Instantly I ducked down behind the hedge, calling to Mattia to do likewise, for I did not stop to think that Mr. James Milligan would not recognize my chum.

Lise, of course, did not understand the reason for my curious actions. She threw out her hands in sudden fear.

"Don't say a word about having seen us," I whispered to her. "We'll come back to this spot tomorrow at nine o'clock. Try to meet us alone. And now, go! Go, Lise, or you will lose me altogether."

While Lise was hesitating, we gained the shelter of the wall and stole along until we came to vines that hid us from sight.

"Do you know," Mattia said to me, the moment we could talk without risk, "I am not at all willing to wait

until tomorrow to see Mrs. Milligan. Before that time, Mr. James Milligan might make way with Arthur. I'm going to see the mother right now and tell her what we know. As the man has never seen me, there is no danger of my reminding him of you and the Driscolls. Then Mrs. Milligan can make up her mind what is best to be done."

There was a good deal to say in favor of Mattia's suggestion, so I let him go away on his errand, telling him I would wait for him in the clump of chestnut trees a short distance off.

And there I waited for a long, long time. A dozen times, at least, I wondered if it had been wrong to give in to him. And then I saw him coming back with Mrs. Milligan.

I ran toward her. I took the hand she held out to me and kissed it. But she gathered me into her arms and, bending over me, she kissed me softly on the forehead. It was the second caress that she had ever given me, but I remembered that the first time she had not drawn me tightly to her.

"Poor, dear child!" she said.

With her beautiful white fingers she pushed the hair back from my brow and looked at me tenderly.

"Yes — it is true," she murmured.

These words were an answer to some inner thought of hers, but I was too happy even to wonder what they might mean.

"My child," she said, without taking her eyes from mine, "your comrade has told me some very serious

things. Won't you be good enough to tell me everything about your going to the Driscoll family and also about the visit of Mr. James Milligan?"

I told her everything she asked, and she only broke in once or twice to find out more exactly about some small detail. No one had ever listened to me as she did, her gaze always fixed upon my face.

When I had told my whole story, she said, "All this is of vital importance to you and to us all. But we must act with great care. But from this very second you must think of yourself as the chum and friend" — she hesitated a little — "as the brother of Arthur. From now on, you and your young comrade must give up your wretched existence. Two hours from now, be at the Hôtel des Alpes in Territet. I shall send a trustworthy person there to meet you and engage a room for you. We'll see each other there, for I must leave you now for a little while."

She kissed me again, and then, giving her hand to Mattia, she went quickly away.

"What did you tell Mrs. Milligan?" I asked Mattia.

"Oh, all the things she said to you and a lot more, besides," he answered. "What a kind and beautiful lady she is!"

"And did you see Arthur?"

"Only from a distance, but enough to see that he looks like a fine fellow, all right."

I kept on asking Mattia questions, but he either avoided replying or said vague things that did not mean much. So we talked of nothing important until we reached the Hôtel des Alpes, where Mrs. Milligan had

asked us to go. Although we were wearing our wretched street players' clothes, we were received by a servant in a black suit and a white tie, who led us to our room. My, but that was a fine bedroom! It had two white beds in it, and its windows opened onto a veranda that overhung the lake. The view spread out before us was wonderful. When we left the porch to reënter the room, the servant was there awaiting our orders. He asked what we would like for dinner, and whether he should serve the meal out on the veranda or not.

"Have you tarts?" Mattia asked at once.

"Yes sir: rhubarb, strawberry, and gooseberry."

"Fine! Then you can give us those."

"All three kinds?"

"Why, of course."

"And what do you want to start with? What kind of roast? What vegetables?"

Mattia blinked hard each time the waiter spoke, but he did not allow himself to be disconcerted.

"Just give us what you think best," he said.

The waiter gravely departed.

"Something tells me we are going to have a nicer meal than we used to at the Driscolls," said Mattia.

Next day Mrs. Milligan came to see us. She brought a tailor and a shirtmaker with her, and they measured us for clothes of every sort. She told us that Lise kept trying to speak, and that the doctor had assured her that the child was now cured. She spent a happy hour with us, and when she said good-by she kissed me and gave her hand to Mattia.

She came to call on us thus every day for four days, and each time she showed me more love and tenderness. Still, there was a certain restraint, as if she did not wish me to see how very deeply she cared for me.

On the fifth day the maid I had known on board the "Swan" came in Mrs. Milligan's place. She said her mistress was expecting us at her home and that a carriage was waiting for us at the door of the hotel. This was an open barouche, in which Mattia seated himself easily and with much grace, as if he had ridden around on wheels ever since he had been born. Cappy also jumped without embarrassment upon one of the cushions.

The drive was a short one, at least so it seemed to me, for I was deep in my dreaming, my head full of ideas which were foolish, or at least I thought them foolish. We went into the drawing-room the moment we reached Mrs. Milligan's, and there she was, with Arthur, who was stretched out on a sofa, and Lise.

Arthur held out his two arms to me, and I ran over to hug him. Lise and Mrs. Milligan kissed me.

"At last," she said, "the hour has come when you can take the place that is really yours."

And as I was gazing at her, seeking an explanation of these words, she walked over and opened a door. And I saw Mother Barberin enter. She was carrying baby clothes in her arms: a white cashmere pelisse, a lace cap, and woolen stockings.

She had just time to lay these objects upon the table when I had my arms around her. While I was kissing her, I heard Mrs. Milligan give an order to a servant.

All I heard was the name of Mr. James Milligan, and that made my heart stand still.

"You have nothing to fear," she said gently. "Quite the contrary. Come here to me and lay your hand in mine."

At this moment the parlor door was opened on Mr. James Milligan, who stood there smiling and showing his white teeth. He caught sight of me, and like a flash this smile was replaced by a terrible grimace.

Mrs. Milligan did not give him time to recover from his surprise.

"I asked you to call," she said in a low voice which trembled a little, "in order to introduce to you my oldest son, whom I have at last had the happiness to regain." She squeezed my hand. "Here he is. But I forget — you must already know him, because you met him at the house of the man who stole him, when you went to find out about the state of his health."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. James Milligan, with a twitching face.

"I mean that the man who stole him is now serving a sentence in prison for robbing a church. He has confessed everything. Here is the letter which says that he stole my baby, abandoned it in Paris on the Avenue de Breteuil, and removed all marks by which it could be traced. Here are also the clothes the baby wore, preserved by the worthy woman who generously brought up my child. Do you wish to read the letter? Would you like to examine the clothes?"

Mr. James Milligan stood for a moment as if rooted

to the spot. He looked as if he was thinking how pleasant it would be to strangle us all. Then he walked to the door, and as he was leaving he replied, "We shall see what the courts have to say about palming off this child as the real heir."

Mrs. Milligan, or my mother, as I may call her now, did not seem much worried. She said very quietly, "You may go to law, if you wish to do so. I have refused to appeal to the courts against one who is my husband's brother."

The door closed behind my uncle. Then I could throw myself into the arms my mother held out to me, and for the first time kiss her as she had kissed me.

When our excitement had calmed down a little, Mattia drew near.

"Will you tell your mother I kept the secret?" he asked me.

"Did you know all the time, then?" I asked.

It was my mother who answered.

"When Mattia had told me his whole story," she said, "I warned him to keep still for a while, because, though I was persuaded poor little Remi was my boy, I needed certain proofs so there could not possibly be any mistake. What grief there would have been, my love, if after I had kissed you as my son, I had been forced to confess there had been a mistake! We now have all these proofs. And we are now reunited forever. From now on you will live with your mother, your brother" — here she pointed to Lise and Mattia — "and with those who loved you when you were poor and in need."

CHAPTER XLI

WITH MY FAMILY

Years have passed — many of them — but they have all been short ones, for they have been filled with fair and happy days.

As I write these words I am living in England, in Milligan Park, the manor house of my fathers.

The child without a family, without support, abandoned, and lost by his dear ones, tossed about by the whim of fate, without a light to guide his path on the vast sea where he was struggling for life, without a safe harbor anywhere to receive him — this same child now not only has a mother and a brother whom he loves and by whom he is loved in turn, but he belongs to an ancient family which has left him an honored name in his native country, and a great fortune.

The wretched little orphan who as a child slept so many nights in a stable, a shed, or a corner of the woods under the open stars is now the heir to an old ancestral castle. Tourists visit it because of its historic fame; all the guide books recommend a visit to its splendors.

It is situated fifty or sixty miles west of the place where I took ship when fleeing from the police. The castle walls rise halfway up the slope from a valley which is thickly wooded despite its nearness to the sea. The building stands on a sort of natural terrace and is in the shape of a square, with a great round tower flanking each

of its four corners. The two sides of the château which are exposed to the south and west are covered by wistaria and climbing rose vines. The other two faces of the structure are hidden beneath ivy whose age is proven by the huge stalks which emerge from the ground as thick through as a man's body.

A huge private estate surrounds the castle; it is planted with old trees which have never felt the touch of the pruning hook or the axe, and it is watered by pure and limpid streams which keep its sward forever green. In a forest of venerable beech trees crows come each night to roost, announcing with their croaking the beginning and the end of day. Such is the old manorial estate Milligan Park where our family dwells: my mother, my brother, my wife, and I.

During the six months that we have already been installed here, I have spent many hours in the library-office of the castle, where are preserved the family records, the title deeds to property, and all the documents and papers of our house. In this room, bent over a great oak table blackened by age, I have given myself up to writing. But it has not been the family records and documents that I have been studying so patiently; it has been the book of my memories that I have been pondering and putting into shape.

We are about to baptize our first child, our son, little Mattia. And as a souvenir of this occasion I am going to present to all my friends of former days a copy of the story of those adventures of mine with which they were connected. This history of my early years will be a testi-

mony of affection for those friends who gave me their help and love when I was a poor foundling. As soon as I finished a chapter of my story I sent it off to Dorchester to be printed, and this very day I am awaiting the arrival of autographed copies of my book, one of which is to be handed each of my guests.

This reunion is to be a surprise party for my wife, who will soon be welcoming into our home her father, her sister, her brothers, and her Aunt Catherine. Nobody has been in my secret thus far except my mother and my brother. And, unless some unexpected event upsets our carefully laid plans, tonight will find beneath my roof every one from out the past whom I love — with one sole exception.

There will be one figure lacking at our feast, for, however great may be the power of fate, it cannot give life back to the dead. Poor dear old master Vitalis, how happy I should have been to watch over your closing days! You could have laid aside your bagpipe, your sheepskin coat and velvet waistcoat; you would never again have had to say, "Forward, my children!" An honored old age would have permitted you to raise again your beautiful white head; you could have resumed your rightful name: Vitalis the old vagabond would have again become Carlo Balzani the famous singer. But, although death forbade me to help you as I wished, I have at least shown my love for your memory; and in Paris, in the cemetery of Montparnasse, this name of Carlo Balzani is inscribed on the marble tomb which my mother at my request had raised to you. Your bust in

bronze surmounts the tomb, sculptured after the portraits which were published abroad during the period of your fame; and this likeness of you serves to recall your glory to those who once applauded you. A copy of it is before me now as I write. Often, while putting down the record of my apprentice years, I have raised my eyes to yours, dear master.

But here comes my mother walking through the great portrait gallery of the château; and as I catch sight of her she looks just as she did that first time I saw her on the veranda of the "Swan" — her air is noble, and yet full of sweetness and kindliness; but the mask of melancholy which she then wore upon her face has been laid aside. She is leaning upon Arthur's arm, for it is no longer the mother who sustains her sickly and weakened son. He has grown to be a fine and strong young man. In spite of the evil prophecy of our uncle, Mr. James Milligan, the miracle has been accomplished. Arthur has lived, and shows every sign of doing so for years yet to come.

Some few steps behind them I see an old woman clad like a French peasant and carrying in her arms a tiny baby wrapped in a white pelisse. The French peasant is Mother Barberin, and the child is my son, young Mattia. After I had found my mother, I very much wanted Mother Barberin to live near us, but she had refused.

"No, little Remi," she had said, "my place just now is not in your mother's house. You will have a great deal of work to do, learning how to become a real gentleman in education as you already are by birth. What would I be doing all this time in the home of your real

mother? Let me go back to Chavanon, but do not imagine that our separation will be forever. Some time you will grow up, marry, and have children of your own. Then, if you still want me to come and if I am still alive, I shall return to you and be the nurse for your children. Of course, I cannot tend them as well as I did you, because I shall be old, but age won't keep me from caring for an infant — my experience will help, and I shall not need so much sleep as a younger woman. And then, too, I shall love any child of yours and shall watch over it tenderly. You may be sure nobody is going to steal it away as they did you."

Things had turned out just as Mother Barberin wished. Shortly after the birth of our baby, she had been sent for in Chavanon. And, true to her promise, she had started off for England at once, leaving all she had in the world: her village, her habits of a lifetime, her friends, and even her cow — daughter of the one that Mattia and I had brought her. Our little Mattia is, of course, nursed by his mother, but he is cared for, carried about, amused, and played with by Mother Barberin, who declares on all occasions the child is the prettiest boy that she has ever seen.

Arthur is holding in his hand a copy of the *London Times*, which he lays down on the work table, asking whether I have looked it through. When I shake my head, he points out with his finger a letter from Vienna that is printed in its columns. Here it is:

You are soon to receive a visit from Mattia in London. Despite the enormous success of his concerts

here, he is leaving us for England in order to fulfil certain engagements which he cannot break. I have already written of his concerts in Vienna — they created the liveliest sensation, as much because of the power and skill of his playing as because of his talent as a composer. As all the world knows, the great Mattia is the Chopin of the violin.

It did not need this newspaper article to teach me that the small musician of the streets, my comrade and my pupil, had become a great artist, for I had seen Mattia's talent develop and grow. And if, when he and Arthur and I were studying under the direction of our tutor, he made slow progress in Latin and Greek, nevertheless with the masters my mother secured for him Mattia shot ahead so fast in music that it was not hard to guess that the prophecy of Espinassous, the barber-player of Mende, would be fulfilled. Still, this Vienna correspondence furnished me with as much joyful pride as if I myself had shared in the applause of which it was the echo. And, come to think of it, had I not really shared in the applause? Was Mattia not my other self, my comrade, friend, and brother-in-arms? Were his triumphs not mine, just as my happiness was his?

Here a servant handed me a telegram. It read:

Across the English Channel may be the shortest route to you, but it is not the most pleasant one. Is there such a thing as an agreeable trip by water, I wonder? Anyhow, I was so seasick I could not notify you of my coming until we reached Red Hill. I picked up Christina on my way through Paris. We arrive at Chefford at fourteen. Send carriage for us.

MATTIA

As I read Christina's name aloud, I stole a look at Arthur, but he had turned aside his eyes. It was only when I reached the end of the telegram that he glanced up.

"I've got to go down to Chegford myself," he said. "I'll have the landau hitched up."

"That's an excellent idea," I said. "When you return, you'll be sitting right opposite Christina."

Without further word Arthur hurried from the room. Then I turned to my mother.

"You see," I said, "that Arthur does not hide his feelings. That means a good deal."

"It is very significant."

I thought that I could detect a slight tinge of unhappiness in the way my mother spoke these few words. So I got up and went over to sit down close to her and take her hands in mine.

"Dear Mama," I said to her in French, the language I always used when I wished to speak tenderly, like a little boy, "you must not be sorry because Arthur is in love with Christina. This fact, it is true, will prevent his making a proper marriage, because, in the eyes of the world, a proper marriage is one that unites people who are equal in birth and riches. But has not my union shown you that it is possible for one to be happy — very happy, as happy as possible — without securing pride of birth and wealth in the wife one loves? Don't you want Arthur to be as happy as I am? Can't you have the same pity for your second son that you have had for me, just because you are weak enough to refuse nothing to

that child whom you mourned as lost for thirteen long years? Are you going to indulge one of your children more than the other?"

Mother smoothed my brow and kissed me.

"What a nice boy and a good brother you are, Remi!" she said. "And what a store of love there is in your unspoiled heart!"

"I saved up such a lot of it, years ago. But we are talking of Arthur, Mama, and not of me. Just tell me, if you can, where he would find a more charming wife than Christina. Is she not wonderfully beautiful? And will not the education she has received since we found her that day in Lucca fit her to take her place, and a most distinguished place, in any society in the world?"

"O Remi, you see in Christina only the sister of your friend Mattia!"

"Suppose I do! I am not ashamed to confess that I long with all my heart for a wedding that will bring Mattia into our family as a close relative."

"Has Arthur been confiding his dearest wishes to you?"

"Yes, dear Mama," I answered with a smile. "He asked my permission, since I am head of the family."

"And what did the head of the family do?"

"Promised to back him up."

But my mother quickly held up her hand to silence further speech on this subject.

"Here is your wife," she whispered. "We will talk about Arthur later."

Surely you have guessed who my wife is, so I do not

need to tell you her name. She is the little girl with wide-open eyes, with wistful face, whom you know, Lise, delicate, light, fairy-like. Lise is no longer dumb, but luckily she is as quick and as keen as ever, and her daintiness lends her beauty a touch of heaven itself. Lise never left my mother's side, but studied and learned beneath her loving eyes. And she has become a beautiful young woman, the prettiest of all young women, endowed in my eyes with all the graces, all the good qualities, and all the virtues — for I love her. I asked my mother to give Lise to me as my wife, and she could not bear to refuse my request, although she hesitated for a long time because of the difference in our condition. Mother's consent to our marriage angered and scandalized some of our noble relatives, but three of the four who were vexed have already been reconciled to us, won back by Lise's graciousness. And the fourth is only waiting his turn to come back to the fold until we can visit him and offer our excuses for being so happy. And this visit is planned for tomorrow.

"Well," Lise said as she entered the room, "what is going on in here? There seems to be a secret of some sort. Arthur's just left for the Chegford depot, and the break has gone over to Ferry. Tell me what is all the mystery about, won't you?"

We smiled but we did not answer.

Lise put an arm around Mother's neck and kissed her tenderly.

"As long as you are in the conspiracy, dear Mother, I am not the least bit worried," she said. "For I know

that, as usual, you are working for our happiness. But all this makes me none the less curious."

Time sped quickly by, and the break which I had sent to Ferry station to get Lise's family might be expected at any moment now. So, wishing to tease my wife a little longer, I picked up the field glasses that we use to watch the ships that pass far off at sea, but instead of pointing them at the ocean I turned them to the road that leads home from Ferry.

"Take a look through these glasses," I told my wife, "and your curiosity will be satisfied."

She did as I suggested, but without seeing anything more than the white road because it was still too early for the carriage to make its appearance.

Then I took the glasses from her and looked through them.

"You say you don't see anything in this telescope?" I asked, with the tone of voice in which Vitalis used to make his showman's speech. "Why, the instrument is simply wonderful! With its magic aid I pass across the sea and go to France. And there I see a dainty cottage in the suburbs of Sceaux, and a gentleman with white hair is hurrying onward two women who accompany him.

"'Make haste,' he is calling, 'or we shall miss the train and I shan't get to England in time to be at my grandchild's baptism. Mrs. Catherine, speed up a little, I beg of you — you've always been behindhand during the ten years we've lived together. What's that, Etienne? You tell me I shouldn't speak so sharply to

Catherine, Miss Policeman? Nonsense! I was just taking her to task in a friendly way. Don't you suppose I know that Catherine is the best sister in the world, just as you, Etiennette, are the best of daughters? Where could I find another such generous daughter, who refuses to get married in order to stay at home and look after her old father? My dear, you are still carrying on as a grown woman the rôle of guardian angel that you undertook as a child.' "

I move the glasses in another direction, as if I wished to point them at another scene.

"And now," I go on to say, "I am looking at a steamboat, a great liner returning from the Antilles and swinging in toward Havre. On board the ship I see a young man who is returning from a botanical journey of exploration in the regions of the Amazon. They say that he is bringing back a collection of plants utterly unknown in Europe and that the first part of his trip, published in the journals, tells a strange story. His name, Benjamin Acquin, is already famous. He has but one worry, and that is he may not arrive in Havre soon enough to catch the Southampton packet and rejoin his family in Milligan Park. My field glass is gifted with such magic that it now shows me he has caught the boat for Southampton and is on his way to us."

Again I sweep the telescope into a new field of vision and go on with my narrative:

"And now I not only see what is coming — I hear it! Two men are in a carriage talking together, an old fellow and a younger one."

"The gray-haired man is the schoolmaster who for nearly half a century has had at heart the best interests of the mining town where he teaches."

"This has been a very interesting trip for us,' the old man is saying.

"It most certainly has, Master.'

"You are not only going to have the chance, my dear Alexis, to embrace your family and to shake hands with that Remi who never forgets us, but, what is more, you are going to join me in an inspection of the Welsh mines. You'll learn some curious things down in them. And on your return to Truyère you can introduce some improvements there which will give you a strong hold on the position you have won by your hard work. For my part, I shall gather some specimens of ore and add them to the collection the town of Varses has accepted from my hands. Isn't it too bad that Gaspard was unable to make the journey?"

I was going to continue my speech, but Lise came up to me, took my head between her two hands, and kissed me, so that I had to stop talking.

"Oh, what a fine surprise you have given me!" she said in a voice trembling with emotion.

"I am not the one to thank, but your mother is the one who wished to gather together all those who had been good to her abandoned son. If you had not closed my mouth with your kiss, you would have learned that we are also expecting Bob, who has become the most famous showman in England, and his brother who commands the 'Eclipse.'"

At this moment the sound of wheels comes to our ears, and a few seconds thereafter a second carriage comes into view. We rush to the window and see the break, in which Lise at once recognizes her father, her Aunt Catherine, her sister Etiennette, and her brothers Alexis and Benjamin. Beside Alexis is seated the white-haired and stooping schoolmaster. From the opposite direction there comes the landau; its top is lowered, and we can see Mattia and Christina waving their hands to us. Right behind the landau appears a high-wheeled cart driven by Bob himself — he looks quite the gentleman in his careful dress, but at his side sits his brother, still the same rugged sailor who took us aboard his ship at Isigny.

We tear down the staircase as fast as we can, to greet our guests at the foot of the porch. . . .

The dinner hour finds us all reunited about the same table, and of course the talk turns to the past.

"Not long ago," said Mattia, "I met in the Casino at Baden a gentleman with white and pointed teeth who was continually smiling, despite his bad luck at the gaming table. He did not recognize me, so he asked me for a coin in order that he might bet on a sure combination. We went into partnership, but it was not a successful one; Mr. James Milligan lost."

"You mustn't tell such things before Remi," my mother warned Mattia. "He is likely to send money to help his uncle."

"Of course I am, Mama dear."

"Then where would be the punishment he ought to suffer for his wickedness?" my mother asked.

"In the fact that my uncle, after losing his fortune, would owe his very bread to those he persecuted and wished to kill."

"I have had news of your thieving accomplices," said Bob.

"Of that terrible Driscoll man?" Mattia asked.

"Not of Driscoll himself, who must be a convict overseas by this time, but of the Driscoll family. Mrs. Driscoll was burned to death one day — she fell into the fire instead of across the table. Ned and Allen have just been sentenced to deportation and will be sent to join their father."

"What's happened to Kate?"

"Little Kate is looking after her grandfather, who continues to live — they are still in the house in Red Lion Court. The old man has some money, and they are not in distress."

"If she ever gets cold, I'm sorry for her," said Mattia, laughing. "Remember how the old fellow didn't like to have any one share the chimney breast with him?"

Each one had some news to contribute to this re-awakening of the past. When dinner was over, Mattia came to me and drew me aside.

"I have a bright idea," he said. "You and I have so often made music for people who did not care one way or the other about it. Let us now make a little for those we love."

"You just can't get along without music, can you?" I laughed. "In days gone by, you even played to a certain cow. Do you remember how frightened she got?"

“Ha-ha! Are you going to play the Neapolitan ballad?”

“I love it more than all other music, for it gave the power of speech back to my Lise.”

And we took up our instruments. From a beautiful box lined with velvet Mattia had drawn an old fiddle that would have brought perhaps two francs at an auction. And from its wrappings I had produced a harp whose wood had been restored to its natural color by many a soaking rain.

The guests formed a circle about us. And just at this moment a dog, the poodle Cappy, presented himself. He is old now, and deaf — good old soul! But his sight is still of the best, and from the cushion where he has been lolling he has seen and recognized his harp. So he limps over to take his share in the performance. In his jaws he carries a saucer, for he intends to make the rounds of the “distinguished audience.” And for this purpose he tries to stand up on his hind legs, but he discovers he is too weak for that. So down he sits, and, saluting the company very gravely, he places his paw above his heart and bows.

When Mattia and I have done with our playing, Cappy gets up the best he can and makes his rounds. Each one present puts something into his saucer, and Cappy, quite overcome by the size of his receipts, brings them to me. It is by all odds the best collection he has ever made; there are nothing but gold and silver pieces — one hundred and seventy francs in all.

I kiss Cappy’s nose, as in the days gone by, when

he used to keep to my side to comfort me. And this reminder of the misery of my childhood suggests to me an idea.

"This sum of money," I say with a bow of thanks to my guests, "will be used to found a home for little street musicians. My mother and I will contribute the rest."

"Dear Madame," Mattia said, as he bent to touch my mother's hand with his lips, "I beg that I, too, may share in this good work of yours. If you will permit me, the proceeds of my first concert in London will be added to Cappy's collection."





